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SORRY HER LOT WHO LOVES TOO WELL.

A Novel.

BY

MARIA M. GRANT,

AUTHOR OF

"THE SUN MAID," "ARTISTE,"

ETC., ETC.

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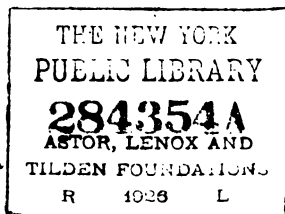
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SORRY HER LOT WHO LOVES TOO WELL.

CHAPTER I.

A CHAPTER OF YEARS AGO—ANNO DOMINI 1854.

THE nursery of VICTOR LESCAR was Le Grand St. Marteau, a suburb of Paris.

It is evening in Le Grand St. Marteau ; it is Sunday, and a fête-day as well. It is early summer, and the sun has been hot and radiant all day ; but it is setting now, and the rich warm light falls aslant the tall houses, and leaves broad shadows under the projecting eaves.

The streets are gay, full of people in bright holiday attire trooping hither and thither. The marble tables at the café doors are in great request, and groups of idlers sit round them, wreathed in the smoke-clouds of innumerable cigars. The air is laden with odors of Havana, with the fragrance of roasting coffee, with suggestions of cognac, and with a sweet whiff blowing here and there from some rich flowering jasmine or orange-tree nestling in a sheltered nook.

The country people have trooped into the suburb, for at sunset there will be a great "spectacle"—a grand procession to the church. And it is a rustic fête, for to-night the green blades of sprouting corn will be made safe from all blights and mildew by the touch and blessing of thrice-holy hands.

"A great spectacle!" The first fête of the agricultural year.

Before the procession came in view, and before every eye was strained and every mind excited in one direction, a great many glances had been turned upwards towards a lattice window opposite the chapel door in the principal street.

There was a face at that lattice, difficult to pass without notice, even in that gay throng. A very beautiful face—of a type dark, warm and southern. Very young—the soft outline of the rounded cheek being full and childlike—but already striking and remarkable.

The lips were curling with something of contempt and cynical amusement as she looked on the crowd—an expression that sat strangely on the young countenance.

She was kneeling on the floor, her elbows resting on the window-sill; and over her shoulder, above her coils of black hair and the scarlet anemones, appeared from time to time another face, bright, fair, and boyish, a great contrast to her own.

He looked out evidently, when she called him, to witness something more than ordinarily attractive in the scene below, and then he leant over her, rested his hand by hers on the window-ledge, put out his head, with its fair curling hair, into the sunshine, and looked up and down the street with a happy light dancing in his blue eyes.

The window was on the second story, but they laughed so merrily, and talked so loud, that everybody looked up at them; and as they had many friends among the crowd, they often exchanged greetings with one and with another, and bonbons, bunches of violets, and sprigs of lilac blossom were flung up to the lattice, with shouts of—

"Ha, Victor!"

"Ha, Faustine!"

But the procession trooped into the church, and

both boy and girl turned from the window. There was more now to interest them within the room.

Turning from the glow of sunshine, and from the gay street-scene below, it seemed a dark and dingy room. It was poorly furnished; the walls were grey, marled and plastered. The great empty fire-place made a deep shadowy crevice on one side, and on the other were broad rows of shelves, bearing books, curious bits of machinery, and some vessels of red earthenware.

There were two windows—one wide open to the evening air, at which Faustine had knelt, the other closed and barricaded by a wooden table pushed close against it.

This table was covered with a profusion and litter of curious tools—watches and watch-cases, springs, broken bits of fine machine-work, pincers, and strange-looking instruments of unaccountable use.

Close to it sat an old man, wrinkled and grey-locked, his head bending eagerly over his tools, and his fingers playing nervously among them, with a quick but curiously delicate and certain touch.

Pincers, screw, wires and watch-springs were picked up, and again rejected, by a worn white hand, that seemed empowered to select among the countless tools, with a subtle intuition quite independent of any optical aid.

One eye, quick and eager still, despite work and age, glittered over the table, and shot glances sometimes about the room; the other was hidden away behind a long tube magnifying-glass, stuck in under the brow, and fastened with a green cord over the grey locks.

Auber Dax—the watch-mender of Le Grand St. Marteau—a name well known in Paris from Charonne to Auteuil.

He had not gone down to join the followers of the holy procession to St. Clive; he had not stopped the click of his tools, nor taken the glass from his eye,

as the priests trooped past his lattice. He had little heeded the jests and laughter, as the rustic crowd went to and fro.

But he raised his head now, and his one bright uncovered eye, as he turned to join a discussion that (all regardless of festive sights and ecclesiastical array) was growing hot and stormy round the square table in the centre of the room.

For Auber Dax had visitors; and, indeed, at this hour of the evening, he was never without them.

Now, the procession was quite gone by, and Victor had looked at it with silent and half-reverent awe, and Faustine with cynical contempt—they had turned to listen, and Auber had turned to join, in what Alphonse de Lescar and Friedrich Hanker called a "discussion" on the events of the day.

By "the day," they meant, not this Sunday fête at Le Grand St. Marteau, but the era in national history—the state of things as they were.

It was the year '54.

Nicholas was stretching just then a covetous and persistent grasp towards the Ottoman Empire.

France and England alike were thrilling with military ardor. A current of genial sympathy was flowing warmly between them, and together they were hurrying eastward, to uphold the just balance of national power.

It was a time of intense excitement, and, 'mid the glow of universal enthusiasm, the grievances of '48 seemed quite forgotten by all republican disturbers of French rule.

Alphonse de Lescar, fierce revolutionist in time of peace, hot patriot in the day of war, was the one true enthusiast of the moment. His heart beat wildly under his green frock, as he tossed down his cognac to the victories of the Tricolor, and shot furious glances across the table at Hanker, who had dared to speak contemptuously of the glory of the Imperial Eagle and *of the soldier of France*.

"Hein !" Friedrich Hanker had said stubbornly, "it is but yesterday since '48, and it was just before then that I came to Paris ; and well I remember, mon Capitaine, that Frenchmen of that day, glowing with republican ardor, hated a Napoleon or a Bourbon as the direst enemies of man ; and a French soldier would have emptied his firelock in the dust, before he raised it to salute a crown. And now, bah ! every soldier in France is ready to follow the Emperor-general to the battle-field."

"Sacre !" shouted the soldier, "no man shall call me a turncoat ! I love liberty, Friedrich Hanker, with a deeper passion than the strongest pulse that has ever throbb'd through your dull veins. But, heavens ! I love France still better—I love her glory, and her arms—and I follow the man who best leads her to victory. When her flag is unfurled, it shall never be said that I, Alphonse de Lescar, lagged behind. Dieu ! this is no time for petty street conspiracies, when the honor of France is in the scales."

"No work can be great beside the glory of our flag and country," shouted Lescar, dashing his empty glass, in his excitement, upon the ground. "Yours is the child's play, Friedrich Hanker ; yours the puny plotting, the mad folly. Your schemes are playthings for a time of peace ; they sink as nothing by the great realities of war."

"Père Dax," said Tolberg, presently, "will you say nothing in the talk to-day ? See, even the children are waiting for your verdict."

"Hold !" he cried, and he turned once more to the wine-flasks on the table—"hold ; let them speak for themselves. Here, Victor, drink—from your heart bring it out, boy—a toast for your father. Wish success to your country's arms."

He held up a brimming glass of rosy Bordeaux, and turned to the two where they waited by the lattice, side by side.

Victor, with folded arms, leaning back against the

stone wall, his eyes wandering from his father's, Henri Tolberg's face ; Faustine still kneeling on the floor beside him, her glance darting from speaker to speaker, with a curious fervor of excited feeling in her eyes.

"Here, boy," cried Lescar, "your toast !"

Victor took the glass from his hand, and raised his head, a bright smile dancing over his face as he looked up at his father.

"The Army !" he cried, with a ring of tender enthusiasm in his boyish voice. "La Patrie !—France !—la Gloire !"

He touched the red wine to his lips, and rang the glass with gusto upon the table, as his father had done.

"My son !" exclaimed Lescar, proudly, and turned well satisfied away.

"But the girl !" cried Hanker, before any one could speak ; "she must drink her toast as well."

The girl came forward unhesitatingly. She took the little cognac glass, filled with claret, from Dupré's hand. She held it aloft a moment, and the men laughed aloud as they watched her ; then "Vive République !" she cried at the height of her full, fresh musical voice ; and she drained her glass, and set it on the table again.

She looked round on them, the crimson color rushing over her face.

"Bravo !" they shouted—all save Dax and Tolberg ; and she turned away from them—bright, beautiful young creature—with that flush of a strange passion upon her cheek.

"Hold, my children," cried Dax, looking eager round on the different speakers, "hold ! You squabble over life and its tangled meshes, and each man you screams like an angry infant on his own wild pipe. Wiseacres are ye, all of you ! Your babblings reach me with a strange confusion as I sit working here."

He turned away a little from them as he ceased speaking, and bent over his curious tools.

An open watch lay on the table before him, and he peered into its intricate works.

"Peste ! I do not care," said the soldier, rising. "So he is a plucky one. Victor may know anything he and his mother please. He may go to Heidelberg, to his Uncle Handelhardt, while I am in Turkey, and learn enough to fill a professor's chair."

"Good," said Dax—"very good ;" and he peered into his watch still, while Victor looked brightly at his father and smiled.

"I must be gone," cried Alphonse de Lescar, shrugging his broad shoulders, and donning his shako, with a good-humored smile. "Good night, Père Dax, your words are as jewels of wisdom ; but, like all such treasures, they are kernels of a nut that is hard to crack. Come, Victor, your mother will think me lagging ; and if I march to-morrow, it is little courtesy to leave her so long to-day. Good night, Père Auber ; and, my comrades, adieu !"

He clattered down the wooden stairs, and the boy turned to follow him.

"I will go with you, Victor," said Faustine, "just a little way—to the fountain. The foolish people, with their green-stuff, have all gone home ; the streets are quiet."

"Take my *cruche* then, Faustine," Dax called to her. "It is empty : take and fill it with fresh drinking-water, if you go to the fount."

"Good," said Faustine ; and she shouldered the red earthen jar that stood by his table, and followed Victor from the room.

Auber Dax's grim old room ! where these excited tongues wagged nightly, pouring out their wild sentiments and their dreamy rhapsodies. Grim old room ! It was *one* of the nurseries of Victor Lescar.

It was a beautiful night as the two children, following the soldier, went down the street. The sun

had long set ; the country folk had come out of the chapel, and had wended their many pathways home.

Behind the church-tower now the summer sky was soft and cloudless, tender tints of lilac and rose fading into misty grey. And the night breeze met them, cool and fragrant, as they ran down the little street towards the fountain in the market square.

How fresh and cool the water rippled at the fountain, dancing up in little sparkling rain-drops, as it fell with soft gurgling sound from the stone tiger's wide-gaping mouth !

A few peasant women were still grouped around it, in white caps, and clean, bright cotton gowns. They stood in a little knot, chattering together for a few moments, exchanging the evening's gossip ; then each filled her jar at the fountain, and carried it slowly away.

Only Victor and Faustine idled, plunging their hands into the cool water, catching the sparkling drops as they fell. And Faustine splashed up a torrent into Victor's face, and ran away laughing with delight, while he pursued her round the stone tiger with hands brimful of water, bent on revenge.

Their bright voices rang through the old market square, echoing a chorus of happiness and childish glee.

The goddess Reason was forgotten ; and all wars, communes, religions, and revolutions, this sweet May evening, were non-existent for them. But, "Come, Victor, come along," Lescar's voice shouted back to them at length ; and the boy, recalled to himself, picked up Faustine's discarded water-cruche, and plunged it into the basin.

"Here, Faustine, we must be gone. I have filled it : come along."

He rested it on the stone edge, and again called to her. But Faustine's quick ear had caught another sound—drums, bugles, and the tramp of soldiers coming in the distance—coming this way.

She had rushed to the street-corner, and stood gazing, eager and absorbed.

“Eh, Victor, come,—come and see,” she called to him. “They march, they march, they come this way,—the soldiers, the soldiers!”

The *cruche* was thrust aside and forgotten; he rushed forward in an instant, and stood gazing by her side.

“Here they come!” he shouted, and he waved his little cap; “they come!” and he danced with enthusiasm as the roll of the drums and the clanging of the bugles drew nearer and nearer, and the regiment came marching through the square.

Neat, trim, in straight rank and file, some companies of foot-guard,—their bright uniforms and their glittering hilts all cap-à-pie, all in marching order.

They were passing through the suburb on the road to Paris. To-morrow they would be on the transport, on their way eastward. For they were under orders, marching to “honor, to their nation’s glory.” Alphonse de Lescar would have said: marching, ah, how many of them, to—death!

“Hurra!” shouted Victor as the last company filed past them. “Ah! how grand, how glorious, Faustine, it would be!”

“What?” said the girl, looking up at him.

They were both flushed with excitement still, as they had been during all the evening’s discussion.

“To be what, Victor? What would you be? I know what *I* would, grand Dieu!” she exclaimed.

“You—what?” said the boy, turning to her.

“I!” she cried, with rising color and glittering eyes; “I would be a *citoyenne* of a French Republic.”

“And I,” he answered, “would be a soldier of victorious France!”

Faustine shrugged her shoulders and turned from him; her teachings were of a different school. She ran again to the fountain, swung the water-cruche on to her head, and nodding “*Au revoir, Victor,*” she

strode proudly away with it, a dark-eyed young Hagar as she was.

Alphonse de Lescar had already reached the little village, quite out from the town, where Victor and his mother were to live until the war was over, and had brought them its fortune or its fate.

And there, a sweet-faced little woman was already presiding over the evening meal, when Victor, hot and ruddy with his quick run from the fountain, burst into the room.

"Ah! my son!" she said.

"My little mother!" and the boy sat down, threw his cap aside, and ran his fingers through his bright, tangled hair. "I stayed to fill Faustine's water-cruche," he said. "Père Dax bade her stop at the fountain as she came."

"Alphonse," said the little woman, "do you come from Dax? That does not please me, and you know it. It is Sunday, and I like little that my son should have the teachings of Auber Dax and his comrades as the lessons to be remembered from a Sabbath eve."

"Bah! the lad must live and learn, Marie. No fear for him; there's good soldier's blood in him, and plenty of soldier's fire."

"God forbid! Alphonse. I give my husband for my country, and murmur not, Heaven help me! Surely I may keep my son."

"For to-day, yes, Marie,—for to-day. But who knows? Victor, boy, eat your soup."

They sat down together; and the little mother, who had long since supped, sat near them and drew a round table towards her, on which lay a large Bible, open and well-used.

No crucifix, no shrine, no pictures or holy image decorated her chamber, more than that of Auber Dax, but from a different reason.

Marie de Lescar was a Protestant, a descendant of heroic, old Puritan blood, a quiet, demure little Scotchwoman, rich in deep simple thought, and full

of warm religious feeling. She was an ardent Protestant, and the pageantries of Rome, that surrounded her, vexed sorely her pure soul.

"It is hard," she said now, as she turned gently the pages of her Scotch Bible, and her eyes lit on the old Jewish wail; "it is hard enough, Alphonse, to learn the songs of Zion here by the Babylon streams; and you take the boy where the poisoned waters flow deepest and most dark."

"Peste! Marie!" said Alphonse, as he ate his soup; but he spoke kindly, and he looked tenderly on his little wife. He was a professed atheist and free-thinker himself, but he felt truly that it little became him to interfere with her. Religion was harmless; while it made her the best wife in Le Grand St. Marteau; and (which was all he demanded) her religion never called a priest into the house.

Somehow, too, he had a feeling that she did religion for both of them, for him as well as herself. It is a common feeling. "*Grâce à Dieu*," thinks many a Frenchman devoutly, "*j'ai ma femme qui fait tout cela!*"

"Do not make a soft coddle of the boy while I'm away, Marie; that's all I ask!" he exclaimed.

"There is not much danger of that, is there, Alphonse?" she replied; and her eyes rested with fond admiration on the athletic young form. Then she turned to her book again.

"I teach him as a soldier's son, Alphonse, I promise you; and I try to point to the true foe, that as Jacob went forth and found prosperity at the Lord's hand, so he may go in like guiding, and be safe. As Joshua fought, and Caleb, and David, and many others, so may he fight some day, and prevail. And I teach, too, that as Moses, before all the treasures of Egypt, loved the welfare of his brethren, so *he*, if he come to high place one day, and have power, may *beyond* all things love the crushed children of the poor. So I teach our son, Alphonse, and

so with Divine help I will teach in faithfulness, till the good God, in loving mercy, brings you home to us again."

"Well, well, make a soldier of him, whatever happens," said the father, a tear glistening on his rough cheek. For who knew what *might* happen? To-morrow he was to leave them; so he watched them fondly now.

He had often watched them thus in silence, and when far-away on the weary battle-field he could recall them—just so.

The little fireplace, the bright crackling wood, the neat white cap, and the quiet sweet face he loved within; and then Victor, his slight graceful figure and his fair head, bending with his mother's above the great Book.

Many an ancient lesson the boy often gleaned there; many a light on life's labyrinth had shone from it for these two; and many a thought of higher things, and deeper things, than the loftiest or profoundest philosophies of Auber or the wildest dreams of Tolberg.

This was the other nursery of Victor Lescar.

CHAPTER II.

THE BANDIT'S WIFE.

A **VERY** different scene.

The rocky ledge of a wide meadowy park, that sloped down towards a loch side, from a sunny bit of garden, surrounding an old grey Scotch house.

A picturesque old house, with square towers and turrets, and queer chimneys, from which the blue *smoke* curled up in long columns. It looked cosy, *habitable*, and warm.

The Old Towers was a glorious place to live in, the long summer and autumn through. Such a deer-forest stretched over the rocky brae-sides, such moors for grouse, such fishing in the broad lake, or in the deep mountain torrent that rushed down the glen.

Beautiful Old Towers—it stood in time-honored dignity, hoary and grey.

It was September; the air was soft and heavy, laden with the full richness of nature, ripe and ready to fall away. The woods still wore their green tint, but looked dark and dusky, as if nearly faded, and quite ready to be changed for hues of rich amber and gold.

The day was sunless, the sky sombre and sultry, and the one bit of bright color in the whole landscape was the scarlet cloak of a little girl, who sat on the grey lichen-covered stones by the rocky ledge, where the park and garden broke into a precipice, descending rough and rugged to the lake.

The cloak fell carelessly back from her shoulders, and showed a grey tweed frock, fitting close to her neck and wrists, and gathered with a leather belt and buckle round her waist.

It was a fair young countenance, with features delicate and regular; a quantity of brown hair, of a dark soft shade, rough and tangled, fell over her shoulders, and long dark lashes shadowed the clear grey eyes. It was a proud, thoughtful face, full at once of sensitive feeling, of firm independence, and quiet self-control.

A big basket of flowers and a rough terrier lay close beside her; but she had forgotten both, for her eyes were raised, and fixed upon the countenance of her companion, who sat mending a fishing-rod, on a bit of broken stile, just above her head.

He was a boy about twelve years old, clad in a rough suit of tweed, dust-colored and much begrimed. He was broad-shouldered and strongly built. He had

brown hair, falling heavily over his eyebrows and under his shooting-cap.

He had evidently been the talker, for her attitude was listening and eager ; and now, as he paused over some intricacy in his mending operation, she exclaimed,—

“Go on, Piers, do, tell me more.”

His aspect was shy, awkward, and full of would-be indifference, as he answered, turning his grave dark eyes upon her for a moment, then dropping them to his fishing-rod again,—

“I think I have told you nearly everything, Donna. Let me see; I told you yesterday about Aunt Theo, did I not? how I lived with her all alone, there at Pollingworth, before I went to school?”

“Yes. How strange it must have been, Piers, nobody but her. And had you no boys and girls to play with, nobody ever? not at Christmas, or any time?”

“No ; but I did not mind that ; it was not bad at Pollingworth. It is such a big old place, with such numbers and numbers of farms, and hundreds of cattle and deer ; not like yours on the hills, but close under the windows in the park. And it is a very queer house, too, so rambling, and full of courts and passages. And I liked my room. I keep my eggs there—wild birds’ eggs, you know—and all my specimens, bones, and feathers, and beasts’ skins—lots of them, that Gill shoots for me. He is the keeper’s son. Did I tell you about him? I like him better than anybody at school, Donna ; and when I am big, I will give him lots of money.”

“Money, Piers !—why, not your money?”

“Yes, of course, mine. I know I shall have some, and I do not think he will have any. So I shall give him plenty of mine, for I like Gill.”

“Then will *you* have quantities, Piers, and all the cattle and the big house at Pollingworth?”

He became grave.

"I do not know," he said, solemnly. "Gill and lots of people say so ; yet, I asked Aunt Theo once, and she told me not to talk nonsense. But," he added, "Donna, I'll tell you something ; it is very queer ; I did not think of it when I was a little fellow ; but every day, when all the servants are there in a row, you know, and we are all at prayers, she prays for *him* (she always says the same)—'him who is to have the great responsibility of the possession of this vast estate,' and always on my birthday, she says besides, 'he who has this day reached his tenth, or eleventh, or twelfth year ;' and it is always just the age I am, and that is what first made me think Gill must be right. I do not really care, though," he went on, "it will not make much difference to me, in what I am going to be ; for if Pollingworth is mine when I am old, Aunt Theo must just go on living there, and look after it. I think that is the only thing I have not told you, Donna—what I am going to be."

"No, Piers ; do tell me. What ?"

"A bandit, of course. I have been thinking a great deal more about it since I came here—this is just the kind of place ;" and he raised his head suddenly, and pointed up toward the distant glen. "Look, Donna, away far up there among the hills, that is the sort of place I'm going to live in—I and a lot of wild, brave fellows, in a big, huge, rocky cave. We'll live together, and I'll be the bandit chief ; and we'll make raids down upon this country, and perhaps kill everybody, and steal all the cattle and horses. Oh, it will be a grand life, Donna ! That's what I am going to be."

"But, Piers, will you not have any house ?"

"No, not one—only a big cave, and a great fire in the middle ; and the men shall fight and scour the country every day."

"But what will all the women do ?"

"Women ? We won't have any women," he answered.

"Piers, what a funny way to live! And who will take care of the sick and the wounded ones? for, if you fight, lots of you will get wounds."

This was a grave thought. He jumped off the stile, and examined his fishing-rod silently for a moment; the splice was nearly accomplished, and the two broken bits firmly bound in one. He looked carefully at his workmanship, and then up at Donna again.

"But, Piers, who would take care of the children?"

This was a thought quite beyond him. He flung out his line far over the long grass and drew it in again, poising the rod above his head to test the strength of its repair, and he answered, impatiently,—

"Oh, I do not know, Donna; it is not half made up in my head yet. I've all sorts of bits to think out. Besides, girls cannot understand things. Look at my rod; is it not capital?—it is stronger than ever. I say, I must go down on the shore and just have one cast. Will you come, Donna? You are not afraid to scramble down the rocks?"

Afraid, no! There was not much of fear about her. She sprang up and walked beside him, a little, straight, erect figure, with well-poised head and firm footstep.

They crossed the bit of long grass meadow together, and began scrambling down the rocks. There was a pathway at a little distance, but they despised it, and went straight down the steep towards the shore, Piers scrambling first, carrying the fishing-rod in one hand, clinging to lichen and rocky ledge with the other; Donna descending close above him, planting her foot, with firm courage, in each lower and lower crevice, as he told her.

"Here, Donna—no, lower—a little higher—that is it. Let go above, your foot is all safe—now, again." And so they scrambled down together.

Near the shore, however, a little catastrophe befell *them*. A stone gave way under Donna's foot; she

clung with both hands to the hanging lichen, but in vain—she could not save herself; she slipped, she missed her struggling footing, she clung helpless for a moment, and, but for Piers' strong arm thrown round her, she would have rolled a dozen feet to the sand below.

"Piers, I am falling!" she had just time to cry; and he had flung his fishing-rod from him, grasped firmly at a clump of mossy grass with one hand, and caught her safely with the other.

"Steady, Donna, that's it—all right, do not struggle, let go above;" for Donna was still clinging eagerly. "There! we are all safe;" and bearing her with him, he scrambled down off the rock, on to the shingly beach, where the water of the loch was breaking in little quiet waves of grey silvery foam.

He dropped her then unceremoniously, on the stones.

"My gracious!" he exclaimed, "that was nearly being a business! Why, Donna, what a tumble you would have had!"

She had sat down on the shingle where he had dropped her, and she looked up into his flushed face, her own a little pale and clouded.

"Piers, I think I would have been dead," she said, quietly—so quietly that he looked down at her with no small admiration, as he nodded his head in grave assent.

"What would uncle have said?" he added presently. "I will tell him you saved me, Piers;" and she held up her arm a little, and busied herself to undo her cuff. The grey tweed sleeve was stained through with blood. She turned it back, and, with an exclamation of horror, Piers threw himself upon his knees by her side.

"Oh! Donna," cried the boy, in despair. It seemed such a fragile little wrist. As he held it in his sun-burnt hands, he scarcely knew what to do with it; but *he did his best*. He had bound up wounded retriev

limbs before now ; and he had a favorite jackdaw at Pollingworth, whose broken leg had been for weeks his care.

It was only, after all, in ideal communes of bandits that he thought the sick and wounded had best be killed. In real life he acted differently—on warm, tender impulse, as he acted now.

Out came his pocket-handkerchief, crumpled, grimy, smelling strongly of fish, and with this he bound up Donna's arm with gentle touch and eager care, while she held it suspended with Spartan and unflinching endurance. It was very painful, and she grew deadly pale ; but no tear came rolling over her cheek, and she did not utter one shrinking word.

Piers looked up admiringly at her, when it was over.

"Is that better, Donna ? My goodness, how it has bled !—it's a regular wound, a regular fighting wound," and then he hesitated. His mind was full of some thought, very earnest, very important, as he fixed his eyes upon her and paused. Suddenly he went on—

"Do you know you would make a splendid bandit's wife, Donna. And there *might* be sick and wounded. I think you would like it. You would light the fires, and cook, and keep things nice, and we would be very good to you. Do, Donna,—will you promise me ? When we have the cave and everything ready, *you* will be 'the Bandit's wife.'"

Donna's answer remains unrecorded. At that moment a disturbing voice reached their ears.

"Piers,—Donna,—Gaie !" rang in clear strong tones through the autumn air.

"Papa !" Donna exclaimed ; and then she called aloud in answer to his voice, "Here, papa, here by the loch-side."

Piers sprang to his feet, and walked away from her ; he scrambled upon a projecting stone, and cast his line over the water.

Donna drew her cloak hurriedly over her wounded arm.

"Piers," she said, "do not tell papa of my hurt ; it will only vex him, and he will not let me come down the rocks with you again. Do not tell, Piers."

"All right," the boy answered ; and before he could say more Donna's father came in sight, walking leisurely along the beach towards them.

"Ha!" he cried, "here you are ! Well, Donna." He came close up to her, and looked down and smiled on her as she sat curled up on the grey stones.

"Well, papa, we have had such a nice day. We've been far up the hills, and then we came down here again ; and Piers broke his fishing-rod and then he mended it, and now he is going to fish."

"It is near your tea-time, is it not?" said her father. He drew his watch out and glanced at it. "Five o'clock ; it is quite time you were going home. Where is Gaie?"

He looked round as he spoke, with an eager gaze, for some one missing in the little group.

"But where is the child?" he persisted. "Gaie, Gaie!" he called again in a loud far-reaching voice.

"Here they come!" said Piers, suddenly. "I see them, away along the beach there. Gaie is running this way. Ha! ha!" he laughed, "Fräulein cannot keep up a bit."

"That is all right," said Sir John. "It is time you were going home, every one of you. Got any fish, Piers, my boy?"

"No," said Piers, "not one to-day. I broke my rod in the Hazelwood, and I have been mending it all the afternoon."

He spoke in a shy rough voice now as he answered, and he bent over his fishing-reel, and cast his line again with an effort at self-possession and indifference.

The rich crimson sunset of September burst in broad rays from the heavy clouds, and fell in a glow of warm color over the foliage, the rippling loch, and

the little group on its shore. Piers, as he stood on his rocky pinnacle, his dark face full in the ruddy light; Donna, with her scarlet cloak making a bit of color in the scene, looking up at her father, her soft grey eyes bright with a reflection of the rich sunset; and Sir John's tall form as he loitered by her and looked eagerly along the beach.

A few minutes, and a little figure appeared there, another and much smaller edition of Donna's scarlet and grey—a tiny thing, running and scrambling over rocks, stones, and shingle, with little outstretched arms and flowing locks of tangled sunny hair. Behind her came Fräulein, struggling hopelessly along, trying in vain to catch the little figure, who had rushed frantically from her protection, at the first glimpse of the far-off vision of her father.

He laughed brightly as she came near him, then he hid behind Donna, dodged round the stones to escape her for two joyous minutes, and then he came forward eagerly, and caught up the child in his arms.

"My darling—my treasure, where have you been?"

"Oh, such a pretty walk, papa! Naughty papa, why did you not come out before?"

"I had work, my Gaie."

The little arms were tight round his neck, the long hair falling in beautiful masses over his shoulder.

"Papa," said Donna, "you said, when you left London, that this was to be everybody's holiday. Why do you not have a holiday, too?"

"Everybody cannot have whole holidays like you, Donna; there is no escape from the post-hour, even in this corner of the world. Come, children, it is your tea-time. We must all go home."

And he turned along the beach towards the pathway that led round the rocks, and wound up their steep crevices into the meadow-land above.

Piers shouldered his fishing-rod, and Donna scrambled up from her seat upon the stone, and they all *walked slowly* homewards together, Sir John still

carrying Gaie in his arms, Fräulein dragging far behind, and Piers and Donna coming along in sober conversation. He trudging with shoulders slouched, and head bent shyly down; she walking beside him with erect carriage, firm springy step, and with a glance, full and composed, but bright and rapid, as the glance of a young mountain deer.

Sir John Graeme was a Scotch landowner, and a British statesman, and people said—he looked what he was.

He was tall and well-made; he gave the impression of being moulded, and well moulded, in some native British iron, for he looked strong and unassailable; he carried himself proudly, and looked every man in the face; he had handsome features; he was dark complexioned, and wore no whisker or moustache; his clean-shaven chin rested upon a stiff and spotless stock. He wore grey tweed shooting-clothes up here in Scotland, but they were trim and well-fitting, and bore a trace of the wonted precision of his frock-coat.

His habitual expression was grave and somewhat imposing; and people who only knew one side of his character were apt to be afraid of him, for he had a very emphatic way of announcing his opinions and commands.

But I do not think that any one who had once seen the expression of his eyes as he bent over Gaie, could ever have been afraid of him again. Under a stern exterior, and a crust of British reserve, there lay the sweetest nature, gentle, playful, almost childlike in its tenderness towards every human creature whose simple humanity touched his warm, deep heart.

Men soon found this out, and children knew it instinctively. Men learned, with very little experience, the strength of his nature, its kindness, its trustworthiness, and its breadth; and men who knew Sir John somehow got into the way of binding up their trou-

bles into burdens, and laying them on his broad shoulders.

Every one brought their affairs to him, and looked to him for advice; and people who went out of this world, leaving widows and orphans, invariably made them over *in toto* to his care.

And he took all the burdens, grumbling gently when they crowded upon him. "*Duties*" he called them, and that was enough for him.

"Comes of being an honest man, Graeme—comes of being an honest man;" and that was all the consolation he got out of his dearest friend, as he grumbled a little more than usual one afternoon in Boodle's window over an open letter he held in his hand.

"Nonsense!" Sir John had answered impatiently; "there are honest men in this world after all, Baird, and yet I am sure there are not many, who get the charges thrown upon them that come on me. This is really too much! and yet, poor Ashton, it is one of those cases one cannot refuse."

Sir Harry Baird laughed loudly and merrily.

"My dear fellow," he answered, "that is what you say of every care that comes upon your shoulders—of every single case that turns up. Go on, Graeme, God speed you! You will no doubt have your reward. But what is this business now, eh? An estimable parent deceased, no doubt, and a trifling intimation left behind him, that he, not having found it convenient to make any contingent provisions, Sir John Graeme will obligingly provide for his widow and nine! Eh, is that it?"

"No," said Sir John; "a very different business, but not the less troublesome. Here is poor Ashton of Pollingworth, dead, knocked down with fever in some hole abroad. He was an eccentric fellow, always wandering about, nobody knew where; and here is this letter found among his effects."

"Ashton of Pollingworth! What! the man to

whom that beautiful old place down in Warwickshire belongs?"

"The same. He was an old friend of mine, poor fellow, and, it seems, had not forgotten Eton days."

"Gad! and has he made you his heir?" cried Sir Harry, "eh, Graeme?"

"No, that is the point. Ashton married some seven or eight years ago; he had a son, and soon afterwards his wife died. He lived on, as you know, in his odd nomadic ways; but he sent the child home to Polingworth, where he has been living in the charge of Ashton's sister ever since. Now, of course, the boy comes in for everything—an estate, mind you, of some twelve thousand a year. And here am I, with the whole concern thrown upon my hands—guardian, trustee, and executor in one. Bless me, Baird, it is enough to make a man wash his hands of all notions of friendship forever."

"Gad! a business indeed!" said Sir Harry, "but not an unpleasant one. How old is the boy?"

"Not more than seven, I fancy. God bless me! what am I to do with the whole concern?"

"Oh, you'll manage it capitally, never fear. It will not bother you much; and as for the boy, bring him up a good Liberal, and send him into Parliament for Warwickshire when he is twenty-one. It will be a new interest to you, Graeme—a great interest."

"Yes," said Sir John, a little sadly. "I have no son of my own."

"But you have daughters, man! My dear Graeme, that's the very thing. Why, how old is my little friend Sunshine, or your demure Madonna, eh?—What—capital! you must look ahead, you know. Your little ladies will give you some work at chaperoning one of these days, and you will beat all the matrons in Belgravia, if you produce a 'parti' like this all ready made."

"Nonsense, nonsense, Baird; how you run away with a notion! Poor children!—making up their

future for them already. Why, the boy at Polworth is merely a child, and my poor little mother's girls are still babies."

And Sir John sighed as he thought of the future before him, and that home-responsibility precious and so near his heart, his two little daughters bereft of their fair young mother so soon.

"Never mind," said Sir Harry again, with a burst of his hearty laughter, "you will see I am right. We'll have the boy engaged to your Donna, and bring a Liberal poll, under your dictatorship, by the time he is twenty-one."

* * * * *

This was about three years ago, and Piers already fulfilled the first of these prognostications: proposing to Donna, in his character of Bandit, very afternoon.



CHAPTER III.

DREAMERS.

THE terrible events that since eighteen hundred and seventy have associated the name of Paris with the darkest page of modern history, at the same time unveiled to the public eye a vast association of thought and enterprise, that had been underlying the sublimum of society for years.

The "Universal"—a hated word, fraught with horror, and associated for ever with acts of mad and diabolic rage. The "Universal"—the power is told, and the mainspring of the Paris Commune.

The Paris Commune has unveiled the Universal: it now exists—an association of world-wide extent numbering some five millions of men. The Paris Commune made public the vile passions, the false aims

horrid cruelty of men whose names stood high as leaders on the Universal roll.

But it is only now, when the Commune, flashing like a meteor across the horror-struck eyes of civilization, has gone out of sight, that its flames are extinguished, that even in the fair streets of Paris there are traces of its existence no more,—only now, that men can look back, and trace that Universal, which gave it life, to its origin, and strive to separate, from the horrid evil, the hidden good.

It is the spring time of 1862.

It is evening; and the guest-room of Auber Dax's house, in the Rue des Cordonniers, is full, just as it used to be in Le Grand St. Marteau; and besides the old figure at the deal table in the window, there are several people there whom we have seen before.

Time has been at work among all these dwellers in Le Grand St. Marteau, and changes have taken place.

The noisy soldier, Alphonse de Lescar, went out in that year '54 to the campaign in Turkey, with his famous artillery corps. Every battle enrolled on the lists of the allies' victories, found him somewhere in the front. Men fell round him like mown grass; but, "Dieu sait," as he often ejaculated later, "what it was—perhaps Marie's prayers were a shield to him"—but so it was, he came back unscathed, leaving most of the regiment behind him, with a colonel's epaulets on his coat, a proud, and, as Auber Dax said, "a ten-fold more vain-glorious man." He got the legion of honor; he went off contented, and has been grilling in Africa ever since.

His little wife had just seen him return, had rejoiced and thanked God for him, and then—she had been taken away.

The little home in Le Grand St. Marteau had been broken up, and Victor sent by his father to the learned uncle in Heidelberg.

He had stayed there for years; he had been edu-

cated even beyond the highest pitch to which Auber's dreams had aspired ; and now, in 1862, he had just returned to Paris, his life and its career before him.

His first thought was Le Grand St. Marteau, the green mound below the cypress, in the Protestant corner of the *cimetière*,—and then, the knot of dear old friends opposite L'Eglise St. Clive.

He found the green mound fresh and fragrant the violets and lilies his boyish hands had placed there coming into bloom. Dax, the centre of his knot of friends, was gone from Le Grand St. Marteau, and established in much altered circumstances in the Rue des Cordonniers in Paris.

There he had to hunt him out, and to-night he had found him.

Auber's room was crowded with a much larger assembly than ever gathered in the old days in Le Grand St. Marteau,—the uproar of violent voices vociferating was much louder here. A group of varied faces surrounded the table, all dark and bronzed, many weary and pale. There were mercurial and silent, like Henri Tolberg, cynical and irreverent, like Friedrich Hanker, and simply boisterous and brutal, like Varlin and Rex Duprés.

Henri Tolberg was there.

Friedrich Hanker was missing, and so was Faustine. He was pursuing a secret course of metaphysical revolution with Becker in Germany. Her restless spirit had carried her to England, where, at this moment, she was teaching the wisdom of the one great goddess, the glories of a French Republic, and the heroism of Roland and Corday, in a British family, as respectable as they were unsuspecting.

She was absent from the Rue des Cordonniers where the smoke curled thickly this evening from some twenty cigars.

It was difficult to distinguish, in the misty vapors of old friends, such as Henri, Jules, Rex, or Auber ; and still more difficult to recognize in the graceful, well

grown youth of twenty, who leant on the mantelshelf, the fair-haired boy, Victor Lescar.

His slight moustache, his wavy curls, and his complexion were still fair and youthful; his face was handsome, and, though delicate, was full of intellect and force. The expression of his eyes was thoughtful, but bright as a sunbeam, quick and eager as a hawk; and his slight, well-knit figure had a look of energy, and athletic vigor.

As he leant back on the mantelshelf, he watched in silence the knot of men who crowded eagerly round the centre table. An outstretched newspaper lay open here, and one of the number, a black-bearded artisan, rested his open palm upon the page, and in a pause in the general uproar read in a loud voice from its contents.

It was the report of the French correspondent of the *Ouvrier*, on the opening of the Exhibition in Cromwell Road.

"It must be a great sight," said Henri Tolberg, as the reader ceased.

"Great!" cried a pale-faced man, in eager tones. "Think of it!—crowds gathered from all corners of the earth,—kings and emperors, ministers from every court, people high and low, of every nation, gathered to see the wealth of the lands."

"Yes, the wealth, the pomp, and the treasures of the nations," cried Tolberg; "and what is it all, but the produce of the toil, and the fruits of the weariness, of the working-man?"

"I see the working-man build up the universe, Dax; without him the soil is untilled, cities unfounded, the world a wilderness. He makes the pomp and wealth of nations, and, 'mid all the glory that he builds up for them, the one thing forgotten is—himself."

"Ah, it shall not long be so!" cried a man who stood near him. "Things go fast in these days. Courage, my friends; the time is near at hand. We

hasten to the regeneration ; we are on the eve of the end of all things. Society will soon be no more !”

“Wrong, Duprés, wrong,” said Dax ; and he rose and came forward to the table.

His eyes gleamed as he raised his head and held his hand up for a moment, with a gesture that silenced every tongue, and drew every eye upon his face. Père Dax was going to speak.

“*Mes enfants*,” he said, “many days we have gathered together here, in this little chamber, to exchange thought and sift words on the subject of the working-man. Brethren and artisans, we are all of us men who live by wages, and not by interest of any capital of our own.”

“No ; but we should, if we had our rights,” cried one.

“Your help is in yourselves,” he answered. “You are satisfied to grovel ; you drug your brains with absinthe, and you waste your means, while all power lies vested in you for your own redemption, and lies unused.”

“What power *can* we have, ground down by Capital on the one hand, and by Government on the other ?”

“Let Government go its way, my children. Have you not learnt the lesson yet ? Will the French artisan go on for ever, boiling up his blood, and outpouring it in mad fights on political questions that do not touch his interests, that bring him (if accomplished to the fullest) not one whit of good ? Let Government alone, I tell you. Turn your thoughts to your own cause, my brethren ; none can help you, but you can help yourselves.”

“What can we do, Dax, bound hand and foot by Capital ? Slaves, we are sold to obey or starve ; not the power of a little finger’s strength have we with the masters. We strike ; foreign workmen are brought in, and we are done.”

“What can we do, Dax ?—what can we do ?”

"Let us study—let us think ; look round and see what men of other nations do ; something we'll learn from them."

"But we cannot observe other countries, chained down here in Paris."

"We should do as others do—send delegates to see ; men fit and thoughtful, to observe the turning of social things as they regard the workman. Nations are assembled now—men from every country ; only France, poor, foolish, ever-intoxicated France, has sent no delegates. France is too busy with her broils at home."

Victor, during all this, had listened, silent and eager, drinking in every word ; and now, as Auber ceased, he sprang forward, leant with both arms on the table, and looking earnestly up into the old man's face, "Père Dax, Père Dax," he exclaimed, "*why do we not go ?*"

Dax glanced at him, and drew encouragement from the bright, young, eager face.

"It is a glorious dream ?" continued the boy, passionately. "A people's united protest would set any people free."

"They have learned much of these things in England," said Dax. "Among the treasures of that Kensington Hall are hidden secrets we pine to know. Men search them. Shall we lag behind, or *shall* we go forth, my brethren ?" he continued, raising his head, and speaking with renewed energy. "*Shall* France have a representative from her forges and from her workshops, like the other great nations of men ? I had a dream ; perhaps there I may see a shadow of its realization. Shall we go, Henri ? Shall we go—you and I ?"

Henri's dark eyes lit up, eager and excited.

"I will go with you, Père Dax, over the world, if you like."

"We will go, then," continued the old man, with

tremulous eagerness. "Take courage, my brethren, take courage—patience!"

They understood little of his words, but "Dax! Père Dax!" they shouted, one and all of them, "may fortune speed you on the way. Père Dax! the friend of his brethren, the teacher and the father of the working-man."

They drained their glasses of red wine to the fortune of his journey, and then they scattered with words of good-fellowship and farewell.

Only Victor and Henri lingered. The latter dropped into his seat again, while Victor leant against the table, and continued gazing into Auber's face.

Dax looked straight before him, a rapt and absent expression in his eyes; his fingers played nervously upon the table, as if searching for some familiar tool.

"Père Dax," said Victor presently, "will you tell me clearly your thought? Is it only now the wish comes to you, to go to England? Is it a sudden idea? Explain to me, mon père. I have heard such words as you speak often since I left you. I have heard my Uncle Handelhardt say just such things. I often told him he echoed your old teachings, and now I come back to find you still saying the same."

"My schemes would not include you," said Dax, dreamily. "How can you be the friend of the Proletaire? How can you cast in your lot with the working-man? There is blue blood flowing in your veins, boy—the blood of the aristocrat and the soldier, of such men as your father, Alphonse de Lescar; men who toy with the excitement and tumult of revolutionary thought in the time of peace and idleness, but have no real interest in any cause of the people, and so cast it behind them at the first sound of war. You are an aristocrat and a soldier: we have no place in our schemes for you."

"But I am not a soldier yet, and I am no aristocrat.

I have no 'de' in my name now, Père Dax ; I laid that aside in Germany years ago, when Uncle-Handelhardt taught me the things he loved and knew. I am 'Victor Lescar,' citizen of the world, and friend of the people. Let me go ; do let me go with you. I have money enough," he added, impetuously ; "my uncle left me all he had. And I have written to my father, saying I must travel more, and study more, before I go out to him ; and I know he will not object. I want to go to an English college, and I will some day ; but now," he persisted, with gentle tenderness, "let me stay with you ; let me go to London with Henri and you."

"Well, my son, let us start together. Ah ! is it coming at last ?" and he wandered off again. "At last realization ! My dream, my dream, at last !"

"Mon père," continued Victor, in a low tone, and with that tender reverence with which the young in that country are taught to treat the old they love, "will you tell me your dream ?"

"Not now ; no, no, not now. I will tell no one till realization comes ; no one, till I stand in the council of the nations, and cast in my handful of seed—precious eternal seed—to reach to the world's width, to last the world's time."

"A handful of corn on the tops of the mountains, shaking unto the ends of the earth," murmured Victor.

"Henri knows my dream," the old man continued. "I told him once, Victor, in a quiet time ; for I am old, boy, and I might die. If so, he has the seed—the sowing will be for him. But if I live !—ah, if I live to realize !"

"When shall we start, mon père ?"

"Henri, are *you* ready ?" asked Dax.

"Ready when you will," he replied.

"Then, my sons, let us go. Ah ! may we be successful !—may we gain, indeed, the ear of the nations ; may we cast in with power the words of life. Let us go."

There had been many such discussions in that room of 'Auber's, and the result was, at last, that indeed they did go—these three.

They arrived, one still and foggy evening, in the river below London Bridge.

Victor saw the great city for the first time, walked its streets with eyes eager and observant, and with rapid steps from end to end. Henri walking with him, and Dax often between them—the three paced the busy thoroughfares, and saw the haunts of that traffic, vast beyond their ideas.

They were strangers at first, the three, and quite alone. They found London in a ferment of excitement and crowded confusion, full to overflowing.

The Great Exhibition had brought thousands to crowd the city, from far and near. But they found, too, a cloud—the shadow of a great sorrow, the gloom of a deep grief, still hanging low over the city, and saddening the nation's heart.

The Exhibition buildings rose at Kensington, and were filled with treasures, brilliant and innumerable ; but he, who had conceived this grand scheme for the refinement, the instruction, and the union of man, lived not to see it completed. He was gone ; and the deep thought that inspired his schemes and actions lacks for ever the interpretation of the Master-mind.

London was still mourning the national loss. But the Exhibition was open ; and crowd, confusion, and excitement reigned everywhere.

Amidst it all these three wayfarers trod the streets unnoticed. No one, in the vast multitudes, observed amidst the myriads of strange visitors the fair-haired French boy, the dark-faced artisan, the frail old man. And yet, when this time was looked back upon, and results traced to their life-spring, then it was remembered that they had been there—just these three.

Dax said they would look about them, and judge *all things for themselves*, before they approached *their countrymen* in Leicester Square or Soho, or told

their mission. They had come to judge of English work, and to see the Great Exhibition of the Universal artisan. They went there; they stood under the dome by the Minton fountain, looked down the nave upon the myriads of every nation trooping below, and looked up, with beating hearts and eyes glistening with strong emotion, to the motto encircling, in great golden letters, the towering dome, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace."

"On earth peace!" Dax repeated dreamily. "Can we reach it? On earth—peace."

Then they used their letters of introduction to the bands of the Soho exiles—German, Swiss, Russian, Polish, French; and by them they were introduced further, until at length Dax stood, where his heart had longed to stand, in an assembly of English workmen, all studying intently the same social problems that were agitating France. The day had come; Dax had got his hearing. At length he stood among men, earnest and practical; at length he had listeners, who could reach the kernel of his theories, and receive them with understanding minds.

They caught his idea, calmly and with practical energy their leaders grasped it. True, all the help of the workmen lay in themselves; true, the union of strength was the keystone of power; true, the strength of united nations would make one class irresistibly strong. It was a good thought, they said—a good thought: in time and with reflection, it might come to be.

So Dax's dream was made public, and the seed was sown.

The seed was cast upon the soil—the soil of the hearts and the heated brains of men, and it bore fruit. Such fruit! Results so different indeed from the thought from which they sprang; fruits so opposed to every principle, every aim, of Auber's soul, that truly we are forced to think, though figs will not grow on *thistles*, *thorns* may spring from the fair blossoms

that promise the generous vine. For truly the thing seemed good. Had there been one man in those days of clear intellect, high motive, of calm and critical judgment, of kindly sympathy, and warm genial interest, capable and willing to unravel its meaning, to separate the unpractical rhapsody from the real and beautiful thought, Auber's dream might have fallen upon men like a rain from heaven, with gentle influence all beneficent and good.

But there was no such man,—no man capable who had leisure, no man capable who cared. So men seized it who were quite incapable, in character and in mind—men whose motives were low and selfish as their intellects were inferior. They seized and used it for their own base ends. The results are in the future still!

Happily all unconscious of the future or of results, Auber returned contentedly with Henri to Paris; but they left Victor behind them.

He must stay in England, and carry his French blood, his soldier's spirit, his German training, his already varied phases of mind, to the fresh influences of an English collegiate town; so they went back to Paris without him.

Then he was quite alone; a stranger in the Great City, and alone. Far away were all who cared for him, or felt interest in his career. His uncle was dead; his friends (queer, strange-thinking people) were in Paris, theorizing and talking vague rhapsody in Parisian workshops and Paris clubs; and he was quite alone here, friendless and with the world before him.

He felt very solitary at first, as he wandered through the London streets; and as he looked at the passing crowds his brain whirled often with the excitement of strong, young thought; for he brooded much over life in his solitude, over its depths and mystery, its problems and its end.

He was full of life, young, fresh, ardent and eager; full of sentiment, soaring and enthusiastic, colored

with the early teaching of Le Grand St. Marteau, and with the later and more cultured teachings of Heidelberg. He was ready for the contest, longing for the struggle, searching for the battle-field of life. Where shall he find it? How shall he mould his life? Where shall he turn his steps towards his high excelsiors—towards the beautiful and true? He was strong and eager for action, and life was to him such a mystery—so tangled, and yet so beautiful—so alluring, and yet so strange. Goodness seemed glory; beauty seemed heaven-born: love was a mystic and a tender dream.

Bright, genial-hearted boy, strong in spirit, and brave for the fight. Fresh, young, beauteous soul!—full of confidence, full of hope, full of heaven-born purpose. What lies before him in his own life, and in the checkered history of the lives he loves?

Ah! heaven guide and guard thee, brave-hearted boy!

CHAPTER IV.

EASTER IN THE FAR NORTH.

WHEN Donna Graeme was eighteen, and could look back upon the history of her education, it seemed to her that three forces had been at work in the formation of herself.

Life had surrounded her, and formed her, reaching her character from three distinct sources—a centre of control, a centre of influence, and a centre of affection.

The controlling element condensed itself into one individual, a certain "Fräulein Hippogram," who held despotic sway, during these years, over all the external organization of her life.

She had dawned upon the Old Towers when Donna was about twelve; and since then she had remained

there, directing her energies to the object, and devoting all her educational skill to the effort, to reduce Donna, in character and conduct, to the orthodox standard of a young lady of the nineteenth century, calculated to fill with grace and dignity a responsible position in a London drawing-room.

Sir John Graeme had directed most things, in the order of his children's actions, for himself. He had ideas of his own, and he generally carried them out; and he had neither asked nor accepted much counsel in the arrangement of their lives.

Indeed, their education would have been conducted probably on a singular and exclusively masculine method, had there not existed one personage, whose near relationship to their late mother forced Sir John to allow her some authority.

This important personage was Lady Curzon Kellam—the sister of the late Lady Graeme.

Sir John knew that her influence (if exercised unrestrained) would be very opposite in its tendency to anything that his lost wife would have desired. And perhaps it was this impression, as much as any other, that caused him to decree that his girls should grow up at the Old Towers, form their characters, and develop their individual forces, before they were brought to London and exposed to the inevitable influence of their aunt.

But when, seven years ago, it became necessary to supply the place of intellectual instructor in the school-room at the Old Towers with some more cultured and accomplished authority than the country towns in that northern latitude could produce, poor Sir John had found himself nonplussed.

He spent several dismal mornings in vague and conscientious gropings for himself at the Harley Street Institution, and at other authorized sources of intellectual instruction; but at last in despair he was obliged to apply to Lady Kellam, and the result was *Fräulein Hippogram*.

There is not much to be said against this Fräulein, except that she adored grammars and dictionaries, and that very nearly her whole soul was centred in the art of knitting white cotton stockings, and of darning them, with a wooden ball stuffed into the heel or toe.

She led Donna, through many weary years, a dull routine life. She conducted her through histories, ancient and modern, through grammars and geographies *ad infinitum*, through all orthodox school-room literature, at so many lines per day.

The dewy mists that gathered often over the girl's eyes, as some passage, coming in the dreary routine of her daily elocution lesson, touched suddenly the sensitive chords of her young heart, carried no revelation to Fräulein, any more than the quiver of the voice and the heavy sigh, that would break forth sometimes, as Donna recited to these utterly unsympathetic and unappreciative ears the "Abschied" of the Jungfrau, or the parting of Egmont and Clär. The *idea* in a passage was immaterial to Fräulein—her soul never soared above or penetrated beyond its—grammar!

As time slipped on, and Donna gradually emancipated herself from the control of routine and school-room dogma, and took the guidance of her young life into her own hands, she could turn and feel a certain kindness and affection for the old Fräulein, grown up through the association of years. But there was never any sympathy between them, none of the tenderness that would have sprung naturally from a different treatment in early days.

The external control of a life is not, however, the chief element in that which forms a character. Character is a creation more of influence than of control. Control may reduce existence to the level of machinery, and, all the while, influence may be flowing inward, and creating a glowing life. Control touches action; influence creates intellect, gives food and wealth to imagination, and moulds into existence the individual and inner being.

Such an influence had reached Donna's lonely little heart years ago, in that bright summer-time when the new experience of companionship first came to her, when her interest woke up all suddenly in a mind that answered her mind, and in the pictures of another imagination, that seemed to reflect so much in her own.

Long ago in that summer-time, when she had promised to be "the Bandit's wife," this influence had taken possession of her; and the strange fantastic imagination of Piers Ashton had assumed a powerful sway over hers.

His coming—a wild, shy, dreamy boy—had brought into her character, as with the flashing together of flint and steel, the light by which things became clear—the key by which beauty was unlocked and understood. His companionship gave new life to her being, and her whole mind and character were redeemed from bitterness and misanthropy. From the hours when they had wandered over the hills together, and had talked and schemed in their wild visionary way, she had brought back to her books and to her dreary studies a quickened susceptibility that gave them power.

Perhaps fortunately, when she was about fifteen, Sir John Graeme ordained that Piers' holidays should be spent at the Old Towers no more.

Now Donna was eighteen; and it was three years since she had seen him, her wild Bandit, her Boy-chief, her Utopian Island King,—and during these three years she had, all by herself, been unlocking, one by one, those gateways of knowledge, that seemed each to lead deeper and deeper into the experience of her being. The life of imagination which Piers Ashton had given her influenced, to an immense degree, the formation of her character. The removal of his influence, after a time, leaving the character to develop with individuality, had also its results.

Donna, at eighteen, looked back on the boy-friend of her early days, as the companion of a strange dream-land, whose mystic atmosphere had given beauty but

unreality to her early life. She looked forward to seeing him again with a wondering curiosity, as to what all that wild dreaming had produced in him ; as to the nature of the spirit-land in which he now dwelt, seeing that, like her, he too, with maturing years, must have floated from visions and from Utopias, into reality and truth.

The most potent influence operating in the formation of Donna's character was the warm simple affection with which she regarded her father, and the tender, unalterable love which knit her heart to the little sister growing up side by side with herself.

In the earlier days, under Fräulein's tyranny, the tenderness in Donna's heart could never die while those baby-arms were round her neck, those baby-lips pressed to her cheek, warm and caressing. After a bitter scene with Fräulein, nothing but Gaie's lisping words of consolation seemed to do her good, and in the loneliness of her proud, reserved, young heart, only Gaie seemed in the least to fill up that hungry void within.

The two were everything to each other.

When Donna was eighteen, Gaie was still under Fräulein's dominion in the school-room for three years to come.

But the school-room, with its tyranny, its routine, its boredom, its dreariness, and its dogmas, had never been to Gaie the experience it had been to Donna.

Tyranny glided off Gaie's shoulders, and never enveloped her for a moment with its sense of chill or gloom. Gaie's brightness illumined irresistibly every countenance that met hers—Gaie's smile reflected itself even in the grimness of Fräulein's frown. It was impossible to scold her, impossible to silence her, impossible to be angry with her for more than a second at a time. Gaie's bright curly hair carried its own sunshine ; her eyes reflected in their violet light a *summer that no cloud could darken*. Her face was

bright and beautiful as one of Raphael's child-angels ; she was a lovely undeveloped thing, like a half-opened flower-bud, full of unfolded possibilities, and depths of character, all unsounded and unrevealed.

Such were Donna and Gaie Graeme when, one Easter recess, Sir John came back as usual to spend a quiet fortnight in his Scotch home with his two girls. The interests of Sir John's active life lay much in London.

The Old Towers became the beautiful haven to which he was ever returning, and London remained for him the busy, eager battle-field of life—an existence distant and mysterious to Donna and Gaie as they grew up in their retirement at home.

Among all the other varied interests of his busy life, Sir John Graeme had had the care of Piers Ashton on his hands. He had said to Sir Harry Baird that he would do his duty by his friend's boy, and to the utmost of his power he had done it.

Piers Ashton's schools were chosen for him with care ; his tutors selected with much judgment and consideration ; and even each holiday-time, as they came round, was used to set some fresh mark on the educational history of his life. His early ones he spent at home at Pollingworth, with Aunt Theo, then several at the Old Towers, and—the rest were utilized.

Sir John had been a very busy man himself ; his vacations in boyhood had never been thrown away. He ordained for Piers now, as others had ordained for him. During these years Piers had not been in Scotland at all ; but now, he was coming.

It was the Easter recess—the fresh bright days of a beautiful and very early spring. The boy was just leaving his last tutor, had just finished an intermediate state between school and college, and in six months more would be of age. Sir John felt he ought to see him—talk a good deal with him—find out the real bearings of his character, and impart to him a safe foundation of sound views on political and social things.

So he asked him to the Old Towers, and to-night he would arrive.

The drawing-room in that comfortable old house looked warm and cosy in the twilight, as Sir John stood on the rug. Donna sat working near him, and Gaie was curled on the carpet by his side. Sir John had only arrived the evening before. He was glad to be with his children again; and as he stood between them, he looked from one to the other, enjoying the sense of complacency and satisfaction with which they might well be regarded.

"Nobody," he often said to himself, "had a pair of sweeter or bonnier 'girlies,' as he called them, "than his own."

Donna, as he knew her, was a demure little maiden, helpful and considerate, always ready at his hand—a little silent, perhaps, but sympathetic. He talked a great deal to her, and always felt that she listened and understood. In appearance he thought her just what she ought to be—slight and straight as an arrow, with handsome little features that reflected all the Graemes that had been, whose portraits decorated the staircase and hall.

Gaie was still his pet and plaything—a dainty round little figure, in muslins and ribbons, with a delicate mignon face. Donna was as the soft shadowy hues, quiet and refreshing in his home-garden, and Gaie was the burst of summer roses, full of brightness and of glad young life.

He was very proud of his two daughters, and devoted to them; he thought they did his care and training credit, and they did. He often told Lady Kellam so, when they met in London, pluming himself greatly on his superior method, and on the salubrious and beautifying influence of native mountains and northern air.

"Donna, how long is it since Piers has been here?" he said to-night, as he stood in the fire-glow on the rug between them, his glance wandering from their faces

towards the window where the twilight shadows were beginning to fall.

"Three years last Easter, papa," she answered.

"Ah, so much ! Well, I shall be glad to see the boy among us again. He ought to be arriving now."

And Sir John pulled out his watch, stirred up the fire, made a cheerful blaze, and then stood upright on the rug again.

"'Tis half-past six, Donna ; the phaeton should be here."

Donna glanced towards the window. She could see down the avenue from where she sat, and a soft expectant look crept into her eyes.

"There is no sign of the carriage yet, papa. Perhaps Piers was late of starting from Inverearn."

"Perhaps—perhaps. Gaie, what are you doing ? Shut your book, my love ; it is very wrong to read in this fading twilight. Shut up your book, and talk to me."

Gaie looked up from her corner and smiled ; she could still read perfectly well ; but she shut her book, and nestled close to him.

"I am glad I came up for Easter," he continued, "and I am glad we are going to have Piers again. I wish to have a good chance of some quiet talk with him, so I have not asked any one else here. He will be changed a good deal since you have seen him, Donna."

"Oh yes, papa ; he was only in the fourth form when he was last here. Gaie was scarcely in the school-room yet."

"Ah ! yes, to be sure. How the time goes ! Hallo ! there is the carriage ! I shall go down and meet the lad."

And away he went from the room as the sound of the carriage-wheels crunched the gravel below the drawing-room windows.

Donna rose and stood before the fire a moment, her eyes wandering absently to the red flames, her hands

clasped unconsciously together, as she listened. And Gaie sprang to her feet too, and stood looking into Donna's face.

"There! the carriage has stopped!" she exclaimed. "What fun, Donna!—are you not glad to see Piers again?"

"Yes, I am, Gaie; but—"

"What?"

"I do not know—I am just wondering. It is so long ago, you know."

She stopped—there was a buzz of voices in the hall below—her father's loud, hearty, and full of cordial greeting, and the other answering him in full manly tones, changed from the boyish ring of Piers's voice of old, and yet his. She recognized it, as she listened eagerly—low, as his used to be, with the same shy tones of hesitation with which he brought out the words. It came up to her ear with the recollection of those first long holidays, years ago, when he had come, and brought novelty and poetry into her young life.

She clasped her hands tightly as she listened, while Gaie's eyes danced with eagerness and expectation. She scarcely noticed Gaie's merry, rejoicing words, the low deep voice brought such a rush of memory; but there was no time to analyze the feeling—the door opened, and there he was.

Sir John entered first, and behind him the tall broad-shouldered figure, the same sunburnt face, the same shy, downcast eyes, the same brown wavy hair—an overgrown-looking fellow, a schoolboy still, in the unfinished make of his figure, in the shyness and want of ease in his gait.

"Here you are, Piers, at last! How do you do?"

He took Donna's hand for a moment, while Gaie got hold of his other one between both of hers.

"Piers, I am so glad! How do you do?—how do you do?" And Gaie, intensely delighted, kept hold of his hand, and shook it vigorously.

"How are you, Donna?" he said; and then he dropped her hand, and looked at Gaie, as if her exuberant welcome tried him a good deal.

"We thought you were never coming," said Sir John. "We have been expecting the sound of the carriage for an hour and more."

"The roads are heavy; I walked up all the hills," said Piers.

"Ah! There has been a good deal of rain lately. I dare say the burns are down. How d'ye think the old place looks? Glad to see it again, eh?"

"It was almost dark as I came near the house," he answered. "I think the trees a good deal grown; but it looks much as it used. Yes, I am very glad to see it again."

"And the girls, eh!—find them changed?"

Piers looked at Gaie first.

"Gaie was quite a little thing," he said, "when I was last here. And Donna—" his eyes were raised for the first time, for a moment to Donna's face.

She met the shy kindling look in them she remembered in the eyes of the boy. They rested full on her for a moment, and then were dropped again. He did not say if he found her changed.

"I do not know that there will be much to amuse you, just now, up here," Sir John continued; "no shooting, except pigeons and rabbits, you know. But the river is in good order, and the keeper brought up a beautiful salmon to-day. You fish, don't you?"

"Yes, I like any kind of sport," said Piers.

"Ah, that is capital! Then we shall get on. What would you like to do now?" pursued Sir John in a bustle, while Piers stood silent upon the hearth-rug, and seemed satisfied to look about him and feel at home. "What would you like to do? To go and smoke in my room, and read the newspapers; or would you like a game of billiards, or shall Donna give us a cup of tea?"

"Here is the tea, papa," said the girl, as the door

opened and the servants with the tray and fizzing urn came in.

"I do not mind—whichever you like, sir," said Piers ; but at the same time he left the rug slowly, and sat down not far from Donna's chair.

"Ah, well, suppose we make ourselves snug here. Gaie, you little mischief, my chair ; yes, that's it, and that footstool is enough for you. Now, how many lumps of sugar have you put into this cup?"

"Three, I assure you, papa. Stir it up : it is quite sweet enough, I know."

And so they had tea together. Sir John talked, and Piers answered at intervals in his shy, quiet way ; and Donna and Gaie said little, as, for two good little girls, was right.

Donna seldom said very much ; and when Gaie talked, she, on the contrary, liked all the conversation for herself, on her own little subjects and in her own little way. And Sir John often indulged her, delighting in the childish gabbling voice and the merry smiles dancing in the blue eyes. But on occasions like this, when he held forth in discussion, little girls, who would not be grown up for many a day yet, were not expected to join or understand.

So Donna's glossy brown head was bent silently over her work for the next hour, while Piers's eyes often rested curiously upon her. Sir John talked, Gaie idled, and Piers contemplated this novel aspect of life presented to him.

Till dressing-time, Sir John sedulously entertained his young guest, asking questions about his studies, and interchanging with him reminiscences of different places where he had also spent vacations when he was a young man. Then they all went off to dress. Gaie disappeared into the schoolroom, to the charge of the old Fräulein, and Donna passed on to her own room.

CHAPTER V.

SHADOW BEFORE AND AFTER.

DONNA had finished her toilet, and was standing a moment, looking idly from the window, lingering before she went down stairs, when the door was pushed open, and in came Gaie.

"Donna, are you ready?"

"Yes; I am just going down."

"How nice you look! I like that soft grey gown. Look here! I've brought you some flowers;—put them in—that is it, they just match your ribbon. Stop a minute, Donna; let me put just this one and a bit of fern in your hair,—there! You do look nice, darling. I do like your face, Donna!"

"Why, Gaie, you ought to know it by this time."

"Yes, I do; but every time I see it—every, every day—I love it better. I should like everybody to have soft dark hair and eyes like yours, and a quiet sort of face, just like you have, Donna."

"Some people must have yellow locks, too, little one," said Donna, twining the bright golden curl round her finger with a tender touch.

"Yes, but it is not half so nice. Donna, stop; do not go yet—it is not time: and I shall not see you again, for Fräulein has a headache, and that horrid Aunt Kellam has persuaded papa that I must not go down now without her. Stop, do." She had her arms round her sister, and her head on her shoulder, and she dropped her voice into a whisper as she spoke. "Donna, is not Piers dreadfully changed?"

"Do you think so? I do not know: is he? It did not strike me. He is grown, of course."

"Grown! I should think he has. It is to be hoped he is going to stop now. What a big fellow he is!"

"Yes, he is tall."

"He does not seem in the least the same person to me. Do you think him handsome, Donna? I think I do."

"Yes, perhaps he is, in his own way."

"Yes, I've been telling Fräulein I like his face, it is so dark ; and then his eyes light it up so, when he does look up and smile. And Fräulein has set down among the list of things I am never to do, 'Notice the *Aussicht* of any young man.' But of course one could not help, as I told her, remarking everything about Piers. Why, he is a kind of brother, and one wants to know every little thing about his being changed ; do we not, Donna ?"

"Yes," said Donna, a little absently, "I suppose we do."

"I will tell you one thing, Donna ; I am dreadfully afraid of him. You know, years ago," said Gaie, as if she already had the retrospect of a lifetime, "when Piers came here, I never gave him a moment's peace, unless you and he were talking, and made me. But when he sulked about in the corners with a book, or sat silent all the evening when he came in from shooting, I used to throw cushions at him, and set on Bijou to bark at him, and get him roused up for a romp. I should be afraid to do it now, Donna ; should not you ? I do think he rather frightens me. I wonder if he has any fun left in him. I believe papa has just educated and educated him, till it is all gone. Just what Fräulein would do to me if she could. Donna, I do not approve of education."

"You silly child ! have you done your lessons to-day ? or does all this mean that you have still some to do ?"

"Oh, of course, all the time you are being pleasant to one another at dinner, I shall be practicing a horrid old sonata on the drawing-room piano : you will hear me. Oh, I think education consumes the best years of one's life ! Good-bye, Donna ; there is the gong !"

"Good night ;" and the elder sister held the little

one to her tenderly for a moment, and kissed the sunny hair and the smooth cloudless forehead. "Never mind, Gaie ; a year or two more, and then *you* will be emancipated. Good night."

"Good night, Donna. How nice you look, darling ! Good night."

Piers was standing alone at the fireplace as Donna entered. He looked certainly handsome now, in his evening dress. So Donna thought as she came in, and stood by him and looked up. The flames were dancing brightly, and the ruddy light suited Piers, throwing up the coloring of his shadowy face, and making his dark deep eyes glisten softly.

It was a strong face, full of capacity for deep feeling, and weighted with thought, each shadowy line full of expression varied and intense. A fine earnest face, in which the only want was just the thing one would naturally expect to find there—a look of brightness and youth : it seemed gone already.

He looked at Donna for a moment, and perhaps thought, like Gaie, that *she* looked nice—a soft, pleasant combination of color and harmonious lines, in figure and face.

"Have you been waiting long?" she asked.

"No, I have just come down."

"Papa is late. Ah, here he comes !"

And in bustled Sir John, and marched off his daughter to dinner, leaving Piers to follow behind.

"Good-looking fellow enough," thought Sir John as he ate his soup, and contemplated Piers at his right hand. "Shy, I think. Odd thing in these days, but I like it. Piers, a glass of wine?" he continued aloud. "You went to Pollingworth as you came north."

"Yes, but only for a day."

"A fine old place—beautiful country about, is it not? Splendid agricultural land. I wish we had some of it up here."

"*The land is good enough, sir,*" said Piers.

"I should think so—magnificent. Large farming population, too, all around?"

"There is," said Piers.

"Political interest continues Liberal, does it not?"

"To express it mildly, I do not know that your ideas of Liberalism would by any means embrace the current opinions about Pollingworth."

"Eh, what?—not veered round since they returned your father on our side twenty-two years ago? He never sat, however; threw up the seat, and went abroad again. But people have not changed much about there since these times."

"It strikes me people are changing a good deal everywhere," said Piers. "About Pollingworth they think in a way of their own."

"Ah! what?"

"I suppose you would call it Radical," he answered.

"You don't say so! What is it all coming to? Is the country going to the devil, I wonder, or is it not?"

"Impossible to say, I should think, sir," was Piers's laconic reply.

"Well, all any man can do is to stand well to his own flag," said Sir John; and then he changed the subject, for he felt politics must be discussed with Piers at an undisturbed *after*, not *during*, dinner-hour.

So conversation turned to lighter matters, and Donna joined; and then, just as she left them, the late post came in, and Sir John had letters, and cut conversation short. He proposed adjournment to the drawing-room, where he was soon buried in the recesses of an arm-chair, first reading his letters, then sound asleep.

Donna had recourse to her work again; and Piers stood so silent, first at the little bookshelf, then before the fire, *that she thought*, except for a consciousness of

his presence, that the evening promised to be quite as quiet as many she had spent before.

The friendly tea-tray came in, however, and, as she rose to carry a cup to the little table by her father's side, Piers came forward.

"Allow me," he said.

"Thank you," and she sat down again.

"What a bore it is," Donna found herself thinking, "that people grow up, and become polite to each other, and shy with one another, and have to make each other's acquaintance all over again."

"Piers, will you have some tea?"

He looked distressed.

"Yes—at least, no; oh, very well, thank you;" and he found himself taking the cup from her hand, and then, very hesitatingly, as if he did not like it, he sat down near her.

Donna took refuge in the tea-things, and wished he did not look as if he hated it all so much.

"It is very pleasant to see you again," she said at last. "It is so many Easters since you came."

"Yes," he answered; "it is."

"And you have been spending your Easters in all kinds of places, while we have been so stationary here?"

"Yes, I have," Piers replied, as if reciting a lesson. "Easter of '60 I spent at the Lakes, '61 in Wales, and '62 I was in Edinburgh."

"And this is '64," said the girl.

"Yes, '64."

"Three years since you have been here."

"Yes. I thought Uncle Graeme was never going to have me again."

"I am so glad you have come."

"Yes—but——"

It was up-hill work still—the conversation. He gazed into his teacup, and never got beyond the "but." Donna's feminine instinct came quickly to the rescue.

"Is there a 'but'?" she said, with a playfulness

unusual to her—"a 'but' in the pleasantness of coming here?"

"Yes," he answered, "and a very large one."

She looked up at him with surprise, he uttered the words with such energy; but he spoke more like his old boy-self, and she felt the black wall was melting a little between them. She laughed.

"Piers, what *can* you mean?"

"Shall I tell you?" he answered, raising his eyes suddenly with an indignant expression. In his energy and eagerness for the moment, he had almost forgotten his shyness and himself.

"Do."

"Well," he went on, his voice sinking to a confidential tone, "you know, if there is any one thing I dislike more than another, it is meeting new people—strangers; and I am disgusted beyond everything. Of course, I have been looking forward to seeing Gaie and you again; and here I come back, and find—neither of you."

She could not help laughing, although she blushed under his eyes, fixed so indignantly upon her face; and a feeling of irresistible distress came over her at finding that she was the cause of his discomfiture.

"What did you expect to find, Piers?" she said, hiding her crimson cheeks over her work.

His voice became dreamy, and he looked straight before him, in an abstracted way, as if trying to recall a past impression.

"A little active thing," he said, "about twelve or fourteen; were you not?" (He seemed to have forgotten Gaie in the retrospect.) "A red cloak and a grey dress made of tweed stuff, like my shooting-jacket; and now——"

"I do not think you will find the real person much changed when you know her again, Piers."

"I do not feel as if I ever could," he said; "it is all so different."

"*But you forget, everybody changes. You are altered yourself.*"

"Yes, I know," he said; "I know I am not the same fellow. I was a bit of a boy then, and we used to fish and scramble about together; and now—oh, it seems ages since then to me."

"You are not much more than a boy now, Piers."

"Ah! but it is gone," he said, "the glory of things, the harmony of it all. Perhaps these grand hills may bring it back again for a day. I almost felt as I drove along above the loch to-night, that if I were to scramble up to the very top of the crag there, and feel the air blowing as it used to do, over the heights, that I could feel young and jolly and thoughtless again, if only for a moment, and forget everything but the physical delight of that mountain life."

"I believe you have been overworking, Piers," Donna said, "and have knocked yourself up. You will be all right and feel quite happy about things when you have been here a little while."

"I do not see my way to anything," he answered; and as she did not understand the drift of his thought, and was silent, presently he went on. "Do you remember the old feeling one used to have, as one went up those hills—a sort of panting delight in getting higher—higher—higher, until the whole grand landscape had broken upon the view?"

"You will feel it still," she said.

"No; for the idea has gone from me. I will tell you what I mean. A year or two ago, life seemed just like that—higher—higher—a struggling up, an eagerness to understand, and see, and know."

"And now?" she answered.

"One seems to have been up, and it is all disappointment. The horizon is so bounded, so narrow and small, and not glorious as one thought it—but all disturbed, and confused. I wish one could live without thinking."

"Oh, Piers, to me the difference between people in the world, is just whether they think or—not."

"Lots of people do not," he said, "and they are

much pleasanter, and much jollier fellows than we who do. Thinking only makes one gloomy, and does no good in the end. But some people cannot stop, you see."

"It must depend on what one thinks about, surely," said Donna.

"Well, a fellow may think of his own amusements, and about making his life as jolly as he can, and, perhaps, will not be much the sadder for it; but if he once thinks of other things—of truth as it is, of men as they are," he continued, raising his eyes, and lighting up as he spoke—"if he once thinks of life and all its lies and shadows and delusions, of its suffering and its poverty, and—its end, he can never be happy again—never. It is horrid to think."

"But, Piers, who gave you your thoughts? I mean, how did they all come into your head? Of themselves alone; or did any one tell you these things, and make you think them?"

"I have been a great deal alone, you see, when I have been at Pollingworth; and there are things there that forced me to think. And then the one friend I ever had, Donna, gives his whole life to these things."

"Who is he?"

"Frederick Thellusson: he is at Cambridge, and that is why I am going there. He cares for nothing—not even for sport, or anything, but just the people. And yet I do not see my way quite as he does. He will live among the poorest he can find of them, and be always doing them good. But that is not my idea, either. I could not go routing out cottages; and if I had the pluck to stand up and preach to people, I should not know what to say."

"It would not be difficult to know what to say, I should think," said Donna, "if one could only say it."

"Of course, you say so. You are a woman: you have never thought in your life; and it is all easy for you. But I do not think a man should teach anything until he *has made up his mind upon it, all himself.*"

"But, Piers——"

"Yes, of course ; it is easy for you. Ignorance is bliss. Women never know anything—so much the better for them ; and they never think, and so they can afford to be the butterflies they are. I should not grudge them their happiness, only they do a great deal of mischief in the world, and make men butterflies too."

"I should not like a man," she exclaimed, looking up indignantly at him, "I should hate a man, whom I could make a butterfly."

"You need not take the trouble of making them, if you want them," he said contemptuously ; "unfortunately, they abound."

"Piers," said Donna, suddenly, after a moment's silence—she bent forward, and looked earnestly into his face—"I do not think it will give you much trouble to know me again just as well as ever. But I think it will take me some time to re-make acquaintance with you. I wish I could understand you, Piers."

"I wish I could understand myself," he said, rising. "I was a fool to talk so much ;" and he walked away to the fire.

Sir John woke up.

"Ha ! Eh, what ? Bed-time?—of course it is. Donna, my darling, are you off ? Good night, my dear child—good night."

He got up, shook himself, and bustled after her candle.

"And now, Piers, what will you do to-morrow, eh ?—fish ?"

"Whatever you like, sir. I have got to see all the old place again, you know."

"So you have. Perhaps you would like a walk over the tops of the hills, and a look at the young grouse, to see what prospects there are for August, when you will have to come back and shoot them."

"Thank you, sir."

"Ah, then we shall leave it an open question for to-morrow, till breakfast-time. Going to smoke?—ex-

actly. I do not smoke myself ; but you will find all snug for you downstairs. I have letters to write, though, now I am well awake : post goes off early. Good night, my boy, good night."

When Donna reached her room she sat down, and clasped her hands together in a favorite attitude of hers. It was a habit. She liked this moment of perfect solitude, before lying down to rest, and she often sat, "thinking"—although she *was* a woman—the only sound reaching her ear being the soft, regular breathing of the sleeping Gaie, who had, all her life long, a tiny bed in the corner of her sister's room.

Donna's thoughts must have been illogical to-night, for she could never remember them. She only knew that something in the evening's conversation brought suddenly an idea to her mind ; and she rose, walked to her little hanging book-shelf, and took down an old-fashioned book—one of those quaint old-date volumes which she often lit upon in the library downstairs, and, finding sympathetic, had conveyed up to her own room, to make a part of her little mental store.

She rustled over the pages, and found at last the one she sought. She read :—

"To earnest minds—often minds of the highest type—a period comes, perhaps in early life, when the truth of things as they are possesses them with a strange melancholy, and depresses their mental vision. —A time when the conditions of temporal and eternal life meet them, convincing them irresistibly of the ephemeral nature of all they see, and of the possible futility of all they do. Life wears for them a pall of dark discouragement, and they feel that man is born but to suffer and to die. The noblest souls are often those who must traverse this wilderness ; must face the rocks, breast the tempest, and must endure the darkness, till light comes to them, and they recognize the healthiness of action, the eternity of good, and that immortal day which has arisen on the inevitable of our mortal night."

She closed the book, and her glance was bright and hopeful as she put it on the shelf again. She turned, and bent over Gaie's sweet childish face.

"How different people are!" she murmured. "How serious it has always *all* seemed to me; and to her—God bless her, my sunny darling; may life be earnest indeed for her, but may it never touch her heart with its saddening chill! Little bright one, what would become of us if our sunshine became clouded? Dear Gaie!—I cannot conceive her with a trouble in life."

Ah! Gaie had life to live through, like the rest of them. Who knows?—there may be strength and courage in sunshine as in shade.

CHAPTER VI.

REAL AND IDEAL.

PIERS stayed a fortnight at the Old Towers, and, somehow, he always looked back upon it as a very happy time. He did not define it to himself as such; but when anything, in all future life, recalled the time to him, it came back with a sense of pleasure in the memory, with a glow as of sunshine and summer, and with a soft happiness whispering in some shady corner of his heart. He never analyzed it, but it was pleasant.

Piers spent many an hour scouring the high moorlands, visiting the young grouse in their mossy nests, and breathing the keen mountain air.

It was the season, too, for fishing in the solitary hill lochs, and he spent many long afternoons, rowing late into the evening, in the softly dying light, gliding *slowly under the hill's broad shadow, among the tiny*

islands, where the gull and the northern diver had built their countless nests.

Gaie found her fear of him disappearing. Gradually she teased him into many things. He took to strolling with them by the river-side; to visiting old haunts and well-remembered corners; caves where they had played at gipsying; the precipice over which Donna had fallen but for him; the deep ravine where they had hidden one afternoon, while Fräulien had searched for them in anguish of spirit, and in vain.

Gaie absorbed Piers often during these days, making a boy of him again; and he would race with her, or scramble up perilous rocky precipices to bring down fern or deer's grass whenever she pleased; but, somehow, he always came back again, having done all that good-nature required—back to Donna's side, where he would loiter, often very silent, sometimes in eager converse, through long rambles under the birch and hazel, or during the slow ascent of the steep, rugged hills.

But—these intended conversations and counsels weighed on Sir John's mind. For the purpose, indeed, of giving them, he had invited his young ward to the Towers, and they remained still undelivered.

The end of the Easter recess came. Parliament would meet again immediately, and Sir John must go back to town. Piers was to accompany him, and to go to Cambridge.

And now, at length, the very last day's fishing had arrived. Such a fresh lovely morning! The wind rippling gently on the loch, the clouds soft and feathery, tossing on the light breeze to and fro; and this morning—as Piers stood lingering, drying his fishing-line on the rails at the garden-door—Sir John came out to him, with a grim, would-be stern expression on his countenance, that threatened defiance to all sunshine, and to that ripple which the west wind blew so temptingly across the loch.

“Perfect morning for fishing,” said Piers, as Sir John drew near.

"Rather a breeze," Sir John answered, clasping one hand over his head ; for the wind raised the locks of his grey hair, and the sun beat rather fiercely on his uncovered head. He stood with the other hand plunged in his grey shooting-coat pocket, and turned his back on the loch and the breeze. He contemplated Piers's face, bent with interest over his wet, tangled line.

"You have come out without your hat, sir," Piers said presently.

"Yes, I have," replied Sir John, and he puckered his face to look stern again. "I have come to call you in, Piers ; I want you this morning. It has been a dreadful waste of time, all this fishing and boating ; and now the Cambridge term has come on, and to-morrow you will be off."

"Yes," said Piers, looking up a little surprised, "it has been very nice here. I am so glad to see it all again. Pollingworth is very well for sport, but it is not like Scotland. I *have* enjoyed myself," he added, with a bright soft gleam on his face.

"Yes, yes, that is all very well—I am glad you have ; but there are other things, very important things ; and your *position*, you know, Piers, ought to be considered."

The line dropped from the lad's hand. He looked grave immediately.

"Yes ?" he answered, interrogatively.

"Well, you know, it is just this," said Sir John. "I have some boxes of Pollingworth papers here—some leases, polling-lists, and that sort of thing, and I should like to talk them over with you."

"Yes," said Piers ; but the gleam was quite gone from his face, and he looked intensely grave.

"Well, you know—'gad ! I cannot get hold of you. What with these late expeditions in the evening, there is no after-dinner time ; and then you are off like this *in the morning* before I have swallowed my breakfast. *I tell you what it is*, Piers, you must give it up for to-

day. Let that line hang and dry there, and come away for an hour or so into my room."

"Very well, sir," he said, profound melancholy taking possession of his voice.

"I am sorry," said Sir John, with compunction, "if you are disappointed, my boy."

"Oh, no, it is not that," Piers answered. "We were only going on the loch ; we can do so in the afternoon quite as well."

"Yes, just so—that is all right. I do not want to bore you ; but years are going on, and in your position——"

"Yes, yes, my position—I know," said Piers ; and, with a heavy sigh, he followed Sir John out of the sunshine, and the sweet, thoughtless holiday, into the grave atmosphere of the business-room.

"You know," said Sir John, when they had sat down, "I have had you here this Easter with the special purpose of sounding, to a certain extent, your opinions, and of finding out your intention towards life—of pointing out to you, Piers, the position in which you stand, and the particular post, political and social, that is waiting for you to fill it."

"Yes," responded Piers, the shadow deepening on his face, and a curious sullen expression coming over it.

Sir John paused, and eyed him a moment in silence.

"That is not altogether a satisfactory young man," was the thought that rose within him, as he watched the lad oddly for a moment ; then he went on,—

"Now, my duty, as your guardian, is to see that your opinions are well formed ; to place before you, at the same time as I resign my oversight in your affairs, the particular views which your family have always adopted, and to instruct you as to the side you will take, and the aspects in which you will be obliged to view the various questions of the day. I should like you to leave my guardianship with your mind

fully made up, on all important points at issue in the State."

Piers laughed a little sarcastically.

"Some men are born, I think, sir, with their minds made up," he answered.

"Yes—well, to a certain sense they are; that is, they inherit, with their property, certain fixed opinions on broad subjects of politics, that belong to them by inherent right, and that can no more be divorced, with dignity, from the lands and family than the coat of arms, or the titles by which the inheritance is theirs. Such, my dear Piers, is your position, and it was mine."

"I have only one fixed resolution of which I am clearly conscious," said Piers, "and that is that I will embrace *no* preconceived prejudices of any school, nor will I commit myself to the opinions of any party, until I have formed my own."

"But, my dear boy," exclaimed Sir John warmly, roused at once to a sense of unexpected alarm, "you strike there at the very root of political strength. By all means, reflect for yourself: but, before all things, avoid the fatal sentiment that individual opinion *can* exist in a subject such as politics, where the requirement is a union of energies, to support one class of opinion, adopted by one party as *theirs*, and supported against the opposing energy of a united party on the other side."

"If I could find *any* party," said Piers wearily, "whose opinions seemed to me in the least worth supporting, I would throw myself gladly into political life, as you understand it, adopting a class of fixed opinions, and standing by them. But I cannot find that: all parties seem equally at sea, sir. I cannot adopt the views of any political body, that you would approve: I think all are wrong together."

"Wrong! what do you mean? You are disinclined to adopt the Liberal side, your family have *always* supported?"

"I have come to the conclusion that everything in this country is wrong, at all events," said Piers doggedly. "I think the whole fabric of society is false and wrongly founded. I think that theory of government—party spirit, wrangling about trivial details, while the world wants reorganization—is a despicable and ignoble thing. I think the division of riches and poverty, happiness and misery, is all an injustice together. I do not see anything right in the world at all; and I think what we want, sir, in our country, is not more men to come forward and swell the ranks on some one side of a trivial political party question or another, but some man, some body of men, who will face all the real evils in humanity, seize them with an iron hand, and right them with one struggle. I do not see the way now to it; but it surely might be done. That would be a political life worth living; that would be a line of action I should like to adopt."

Sir John shook his head again. "Well, well," he said, "we'll bide a while. Let all these fine visions bloom into their fruitless blossom, and then scatter their idle seed to the wind. You are younger than I thought you," he continued, as he closed the "Constitutional History," from which he had meant to illustrate his lecture, and laid it aside with a reluctant hand. "All that must blow itself away. But, my boy," he went on, bending forward and looking into the dark face with a kind and earnest gaze, "be careful as you go. Mature well your own opinions before you cast them abroad. It is a bitter thing to remember, in our old age, Piers, that when we gave forth our young thoughts to the world, we gave them crude, full of error and imperfections. Be careful. You are strong and obstinate, you are impressionable and enthusiastic. I resign the effort to present, simply for your adoption, the old family politics of Pollingworth, and your father's and grandfather's views. Remember this, it is a trust; let it be one, sacred and always honored. Prepare yourself for it; educate yourself towards it.

Strive sincerely to see how you may discharge it aright. I will say no more now, my boy. Go to your studies at Cambridge. I send you there, with a full confidence in the integrity of your aims and motives, and feeling sure that you will ere long recognize the line of action which in your position would be rational and right."

CHAPTER VII.

TINDER.

PERHAPS Sir John was a little prosy, but it would be difficult to estimate how much was saved to Piers Ashton, in the future of his career, by the spirit of kindness with which these words were spoken. The boy left his presence with a feeling of reverence in his discordant spirit, a sense of harmony existing somewhere, although still very absent from his own disjointed views.

"Your father spoke very kindly to me," he told Donna in the evening, as they sat for the last time in the twilight by the fire. "I told him I could not be a Tory, or a Liberal, or anything just now, and he did not mind. I told him they were all wrong, and he did not contradict me. Do you know, Donna, I think if one were allowed to speak out one's views, and hear them expressed, one would begin to see more clearly what they were."

"I am sure my father's views are very clear," said Donna.

"Yes," he answered, "his mind is made up, you see; mine is not. I do not know yet what I mean myself: I only have a faint idea. I want more balance, more *harmony*. I want men more earnest; I want men more

equal. I want wrong righted, and right to rule. I want the inheritances of humanity for all the human race. I want plenty, beauty, goodness, universal among men. I do not see my way quite to it, but I have some ideas. I got a good deal from Adam Smith, and from Bacon's 'Opus Magnum,' too. Of course, these sort of books have taught me some things, and then Fourier and St. Simon, as I said. They tried to carry out the ideas," he went on dreamily, "but *they* all of them had a screw loose somewhere, for every one of them failed."

The firelight was dancing over his dark face as he talked on to her, and his eyes were fixed upon the flames. And Donna leaned forward, and watched the dreaming, sombre expression, and traced oddly to herself the maturity and strong development of all she could remember latent in the Bandit and the Island Boy-king.

The sunny, beautiful Easter recess was over for all of them. This little time of renewed companionship was going to pass into memory like the rest; and as she clasped her slight fingers together, and leaned forward, it seemed to Donna that it had been just the same as ever again—that he had brought new life from his companionship, a new flood of thoughts from his strange vagaries, a whole new beginning of mental existence to work upon, a new tangled mesh of truth and fancy to be untwined, to be separated for herself, and by herself, when he was gone.

And she could not help thinking, as she watched him, how little she had been in his mental life, what a great ever-present influence he had been in hers.

"I shall not forget our talks, Piers," she said presently. "I shall often wonder and long to hear how you work out all your ideas."

"Yes," he answered, a little indifferently, for he was quite engrossed—"yes, I shall hear lots of new views of every kind at Cambridge, but I expect to find *them* all pretty similar and routine. I shall like

to hear them, however, as long as the fellows let me alone."

"But, Piers, do you intend to go through life by yourself? Do you intend never to make friendships, or——"

"Or to fall in love, Piers!" chimed in Gaie. "Do you mean to go on making great reformations, and never do anything like other people?"

"I think," he answered, "that is just it. If a few men could be found who would sacrifice their individual existence, their own trifling interests, their position, their money, and everything they have, to a real universal reformation, well, then I think the world might be put to rights. But if men go on just making up their own lives, and thinking about their own friendships and loves and amusements, it will all go on as it is now, and nobody need try to do anything. No, I will not form any friendships till I find some fellows who think like me; and falling in love is all nonsense and waste of time."

He looked straight into the fire as he said this, and Donna could still watch the flames dancing on his face.

"If women would only think in the same way," he went on, "there would be some chance; there would not be so much mischief then done in the world."

"But then they cannot help it, perhaps," said Gaie, left to support the argument, for Donna said nothing.

"They ought," replied Piers severely. "If women could only see what high and great careers might open for them and for everybody, if they were properly educated, and if they would only give up being selfish and frivolous and foolish."

Donna's eyes met his, fixed on her in his unconscious enthusiasm, and she answered—

"I wonder, Piers, what conclusions you will come to when you have thought it all out?"

"I do not know," he answered. "But that is what I begin at. We have to clear nonsense out of our

lives, and think of great and real and earnest things."

"Life *au grand sérieux!* as Fräulein would say," exclaimed Gaie.

"Life *is* serious and great," persisted Piers, "if people would only see it to be so: that is the evil of the whole business. Everybody simply lives it out, in the way that is most fun for themselves—at least all our class of people do, and the rest are forgotten. But there must be a career for a man; there must be a work of reformation to do, if one could arrive at it."

"I cannot think," said Gaie again, "why you worry yourself. It seems to me as if it were all arranged so very easily for you. If you want to do good to people, why do you not go home to Pollingworth, and see that everybody has plenty to eat, and that the schools are nice and pretty; and you might have porches to all the cottages, and honeysuckle growing all about."

"Yes, that is just what everybody would say," exclaimed Piers, indignantly. "There is just where everybody is wrong; that is the evil again. People go on working away, doing things among their own few people, and forgetting all the other parts of the world, while the question of wealth and poverty are the kinds of things that should be put to rights, just in one business—all at once. They should not exist; they should be put to rights."

"Well, Piers, you have turned out a funny fellow," continued Gaie, "compared with what you were years ago. I wonder what you will be like when next we see you."

"I hope I shall have got a good start in some one direction or another, and see my way to the beginning of something."

"I hope you will have made some friends, Piers," said Donna, looking round at him again with something of anxious thought in her eyes. "It is not good

to go on puzzling out everything in one's head for one's self, and quite alone."

"I never met any one yet who cared for the kind of thing," he answered. "Besides, friendship keeps one back, I think, and takes up one's thoughts, just like poetry and amusing books keep one from caring for solid and serious reading. I am going to choose the tough things in life for my part, and leave the rest to those who like it."

"Do you think, then, that we *can* choose our part in that way?" said Donna.

"We can choose what we will be interested in, and what we will care for, and what we will feel about people and things. Of course we can," he continued. "I will, I know; I shall always choose what I shall do, and what I shall like."

"I wonder if we always can?" she repeated.

"A man can; I do not know about a woman," he answered, with a little quiet contempt; and Donna said nothing more.

Next morning the fortnight was over, and Piers went away much happier for having aired his views. In giving them expression they had assumed a more solid and important aspect, and in the effort to convey them to others they had gained some small degree of clearness to himself.

This little visit of Piers, just coming midway in their journey from dreamy childhood to the ripe vigor of their mental prime, brought new prospects into Donna's future, gave birth to new Excelsiors, new training, and new culture of herself; and it left behind a strange new something too, quite incomprehensible, within her heart—a silent, unsuspected germ of sentiment, a subtle current of sympathy, that seemed to unite her thoughts inseparably with his sentiments, with his interests, with his history; and the out-working of his schemes and ideas.

"Love," it has been said, "is but a chapter in a

man's life, and the whole volume in a woman's." If this be true, then certainly Piers had not even read the prologue of that chapter yet ; while, for Donna, in the solitude of her mind and spirit, the volume had begun.

This consciousness did not break upon her at once, but as time went on ; and with too much time, perhaps, for self-analysis and contemplation, the fact, once recognized, did not lose strength, but grew—till Donna, as she looked deep into that reserved, close-veiled heart of hers, knew that she had learnt there a lesson, more real, more earnest, and more vital than all the visionary or intellectual lessons that Piers had ever taught her before—a lesson this time, old as it was new, sweet as it was bitter, strong and individual as it was thrilling and deep—the one heart's lesson (although he eschewed it) that was really human, world-wide, and universal—a lesson that would last her her life.



CHAPTER VIII.

IL TERZO—INUTILE.

To excuse the extreme confusion in the visions of Piers Ashton's mind, it must be remembered that he was young at this time ; and, to understand the contradictions in his character, his curious training must not be forgotten.

The control that had hedged in Donna's development had been equally persistent in his. The influence he had been to her, reached him, through his books, studied in solitude, and thought out into theory by the unaided workings of his own imaginative brain.

The central power of love, tenderness, and affec-

tion, that had kept her spirit safe from misanthropical bitterness, and her heart feminine and sweet, had been missing in his life ; and the bitterness, the hardness, the individual self-concentration were all there.

His motives were high ; his ideals were intended to be unselfish ; but at present they stopped short at a fixed concentration of his mental energies upon his own visions and theories, and practically upon himself.

He knew little of the world ; he knew less about himself. He thought he saw ways of government, methods of reform, theories of perfection, by which the whole family of humanity might be reorganized into happiness and well-being. In reality, he was quite ignorant of what constituted humanity ; ignorant of human nature—beginning with his own.

He thought the world might be put to rights, and that he could do it. He thought he would stand aside all through his life, and look on at the human drama, learn more and more to understand it, and so become daily wiser in its reform.

Friendship, amusement, love, all these lay at his feet, he thought—far below him ; they belonged to the sphere of feeling, and he would live above this. Action, thought, intellectual effort would constitute the history of his career. Feelings are transitory, he told himself ; they count for nothing in the history of an age ; they die when the man dies ; they float away forgotten on the current of time. Nothing is permanent but the achievements of intellect ; nothing is abiding but the results of what we do.

So he reflected, as he sat in the afternoon sunshine, at an open window in a small square room, about two days after his last evening's talk with Donna in the firelight in the drawing-room at the Old Towers. The window looked out upon a quadrangle of buildings, old, grey, and picturesque, where the sunshine fell in broad lines of golden light, and the shadows darkened *in the corners* under the old eaves.

He had arrived there that morning. He was rather uncomfortable, rather solitary, and really (though he would not recognize the fact) very desolate and depressed. For as he looked back on the twilight talk at the Old Towers, the walks over the hills, the bloom of the gorse, and the pools in the river, where, only last week, he spent those sunny afternoons, he missed, somewhere deep down in his heart, the companionship, soothing and sympathetic, he had enjoyed all that time ; and he missed, now he turned to face his old self, that buoyant, natural feeling of youth and joyousness that had sprung up irrepressibly within him at the Old Towers.

Now he was at Cambridge, however, and the Old Towers—with the brown river, the shadowy mountains, and the fire-lit drawing-room—was far away. Here he was by himself again, gathering his ideas together, and trying, as he had often done, to make up his mind about his life.

He wanted to sit still and think about it all, in the midst of his unpacked books, and he was truly disgusted when a cheery, hearty voice broke in upon his meditations, and at the open door appeared an old school-acquaintance, who had just found his name among the new-comers for the term.

"Hullo, Ashton, you here ! How d'ye do ?"

He got up rather ungraciously.

"How are you, Sedley ? I did not know you were at Cambridge."

"Yes, here I am. I've been here all the last term. So you've turned up ! Well, it's not a bad sort of life ; there is plenty of fun : better than old Bowen's, at all events."

"You like it ?" said Piers.

"I do ; I find it suits my taste wonderfully. What will you go in for—hunting or the 'sports' ? There are lots to choose from. Let me see ; I forget what your line was."

"I do not think I have come up to Cambridge for

anything of *that* sort," said Piers, still more ungraciously than before.

Sedley was a youth he had often snubbed without mercy at old Bowen's, thinking him one of the most hopeless fools of his acquaintance, and it nettled him to have to receive his patronage as to a young freshman now.

"You see," he went on, "when a fellow comes first up to college, there are heaps of things he ought to learn; and it is an immense pull to have a chap, like me, all ready to put you up to everything. It is a good life when you once get into it, and know all the dodges; but you have to be up to them, or they let you in for all sorts of bothers—chapels, and lectures, and every kind of nuisance—no end of things. You have to be put up to them; but when you're once in the swing of it, there's no end of fun."

"You seem to have thriven on it, Sedley, at all events."

"Yes, I pull through. You see, I never bother over books, and that is a great thing. You never catch *me* 'sporting the oak,' or going in for honors or wrangling, as they call it; and I do not take it out of myself in the boats either, though I have to do a little of that, just to keep the weight down, or Hartopp would not be able to mount me by next term; by Jove! he wouldn't. I have to go into training now and then. You haven't got a bad room, Ashton. Will you keep a dog in that coal-hole? Capital place!—every fellow does; and I know a first-rate man, down at the corner of Trinity Street, has got a tip-top one for sale. Will you have him, eh? Shall we stroll down and have a look? He is a friend of mine, the fellow who has the dog, and I believe he'd let it go for a 'tenner' for me. Shall I look him up for you?"

"Thanks, no; I think not," Piers answered. "If I want a dog, I'll have one up from Pollingworth. I do not think your friend could beat two or three I *have down there*."

"What! bulls, eh? Fighters?"

"The best I have is a bloodhound. I think he would fight any man or dog that might set on him; and I have a fox terrier, I would back to thrash your best bull."

"By Jove! I wish you'd have him up. I don't think there's a more amusing bit of life to be seen in all Cambridge than you find in the dog-fancying line—if you go in for it, that's to say—and so *that's* your taste!"

"I do not think I said it was," Piers answered, with a laugh, "did I? No; I do not think I'll have the 'fox' up here."

"Won't you? That's a pity; you might make a pot of money in no time, if he is a real first-rater, and you backed him well. However, every man manages his own concerns, as they say, Ashton. For my part I go in for pretty nearly everything: nothing like seeing lots of life, you know. I keep my eyes open, and go slap in for all that's going, right and left."

"Are there any other men here from old Bowen's? Have you seen Thellusson?" said Piers.

"Well, I've just, what you might call, caught sight of him; but he is not my sort. A regular 'pedagogue' is Thellusson; would not suit me at all."

"He is a Trinity man, is he not?"

"No, St. John's. He is one of ours, as far as that goes; but I do not come across him often. You never see him at a jolly wine, or at any breakfasts that I go to. He speechifies, you know, and does the Diagnostics,—what d'ye call it, Society? holds forth. They all do, the fellows that go in for that line—spend the live-long night making speeches to each other. Awful nuisance, I should think; beats me hollow. I say, you've a nice view over the square from this window."

And Sedley rose as he spoke, crossed the room with a leisurely tread, leant his arm upon the broad old-fashioned window-sill, and puffed his cigar-smoke into the air.

"There goes Orton ; a funny fellow, that," he began again, continuing his one-sided colloquy, as he watched the men who passed to and fro in the Quadrangle below ; "and there is Adderley, he is a viscount ; and there is Frere, of course, following the golden tuft at a respectful distance ; and here comes Liddell. I say, where are all the fellows going ? Here are more of them ; and Eldon Rivers is carrying his sporting toggery. Look, he has got his cap on, and that is his racing shirt hanging over his shoulder. Where are they all off to ? I declare, I forgot ! it is the day of the 'trial-go' between Eldon Rivers and the French chap ; so it is. Will you come, Ashton ? Couldn't have a better chance of seeing the sporting men turn out—the athletes, that is to say. Be a capital sight ; shouldn't wonder if you found Thellusson there. I am quite sure he has arrived. Will you come ?"

"I do not mind—yes," Piers answered ; for though dog-fighting, and life according to Sedley, was not much to his mind, his ears pricked up at the sound of an athletic contest.

Sedley was a bore, undoubtedly ; but yet why should he not go ? So they set off together.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RACE OF THE SWIFT.

"Not a bad old place, is it ?" was Sedley's comment, as they passed through the courtyard, and turned towards the levels by the sluggish Cam, where the sports were to be held. "The race is not to be at Fenners to-day," he continued, "not at the ordinary sporting-ground, but down there in a field by the river, beyond Backs."

"And he pointed to a low-lying flat by the river, where, as they approached, they could now see a crowd of men standing together near one end, the white dresses of the athletes and the bright colors of their caps mingling here and there with the mass of black college gowns.

The sunset fell in a glow of rich warm color over the scene, on the Cam, brown and sluggish, lighting it with a dull silvery gleam, on the soft green of the hedges and meadows, on the snowy hawthorn flowering in the distance in "Backs," on the dark crowd of gowns and caps, on the gay colors of the racing flags stuck here and there among them, and on the curious and infinite variety of young faces, all turned in the same direction, all eager, all concentrated for the moment on the same exciting idea.

It was a great race to-day.

"Rummy thing a Frenchman going in for English sports," said Sedley, as they strolled towards the field.

"I hate a Frenchman," growled Piers, expressing in the ejaculation one of the deepest and most cherished prejudices of his soul. "Curly-pated, scented fellows, I hate them," he continued: "they think of nothing under heaven but kid gloves and cigars."

"Well, may be. I am not fond of the lot myself, and I do not know this one here. Hallo! they have begun."

And so they had. At that moment, clear up into the cool summer air, echoing far away across the river and the levels, went the ringing sounds of scores of strong young voices, shouting from side to side the names of the racers, and cheering them on, now one, now the other—now England, now France; louder, louder, echoed the roar, wilder the excitement, fiercer the enthusiasm, shout following shout into the still air; and Piers could stand it no longer.

"Come on!" he cried, "what a lazy duffer you are! Why, they will be in before we reach the post. Come on!"

And away he sped, tearing over the grass and brushwood, leaving Sedley and his cigar far behind him, and in two minutes he had cleared the ring-cord of the enclosure and stood, shouting like the rest of them, among the group of eager, excited men, just where the winning-place was marked by two white posts; there floated gayly from one the French tricolor, from the other the British flag.

It was no less than a contest of nations.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" shouted everybody, and "Hurrah!" shouted Piers like the rest.

He stood among them and quite forgot he was a stranger. His face lit up with excitement, as he waved his cap and shouted again and again with enjoyment and enthusiasm.

Here they come, nearing the winning-post, but only in the first round; they must do it three times. Here they come. First, Eldon Rivers. He was running splendidly, his huge frame scarcely strained, his long easy stride clearing yard after yard of the sward with no apparent effort, and with extraordinary speed. A grave expression settled on his fine face, as he passed the posts—an expression of determined confidence, as if he had a work on hand, and was set to do it. His eyelids never quivered; the expression did not alter in the slightest degree, even when he passed the shouting crowds at the winning-post, and the air rang with his name in countless tones of encouragement and enthusiasm,—

"Go it, Rivers! Eldon Rivers wins!"

He never seemed to hear them; on he sped with that great easy swing of his, clearing the ground with the cool indifferent strength of a camel, as it strides over its desert plains. On he sped.

Then the shouts rose again, louder, more eager, more prolonged than ever, as the other came.

"Hurrah, Lescar! Go it, Trinity! Back Trinity! Hurrah for the Tricolor! Go it! Lescar wins!"

On he came; and a shout of intense delight broke

from Piers as he met the keen glance turned upon him for one second. For, as the young racer shot past the posts, he saw the quivering eager face turned upward, and he seemed to catch from it an excitement, an enthusiasm, an intensity of eagerness scarcely second to its own.

Round they went, and on they came again ; and Piers scarcely noticed this time Eldon Rivers, as he watched for the Frenchman coming swiftly behind, and he shouted longer and more lustily than ever.

The Frenchman had gained some yards. On he sped, the red sunset flooding with a ruby light the lithe young frame. He seemed to skim over the turf with a spring and elasticity of action peculiar to himself. His hair, fair and wavy, floated behind him on the soft breeze, his shoulders thrown back, his face radiant with keen excitement, with intensity of effort, and with brilliant, eager, young life.

It was wonderful to see him. As he neared the third time, Piers thought less of the race at last than of him—the runner. He almost stopped his shouting, and watched delighted as the light figure sped along, graceful as Adonais ! “ *A pard-like spirit, beautiful and swift.* ” A young Mercury, lithe and agile as a Grecian athlete.

Though the British flag was lowered in ignominy, the shout of triumph, and greeting of delight, still rent the air, as the three rounds were completed and in he came. With one last effort, painful and intense, with one bound, and with one glad ringing “ hurrah ! ” he shot past the tricolor, and came in victorious, the winner of the day.

Eldon Rivers shook his great frame together, and turned on his vanquisher to hold out his hand and smile.

“ Well run, Frenchman,” he said.

“ Hurrah for Trinity ! Well done, Lescar ! ” rose the shouts on all sides still, and Piers stood unnoticed, his eyes fixed on the winner’s face. It was so bright,

so irresistibly attractive, so full of keen intelligence still quivering with intense excitement, as he turned to Eldon Rivers to respond to his friendly words.

He raised his tricolor cap with one hand in foreign grace, as he held out the other to his old adversary.

And then Lescar was seized upon by one after another, all of them crowding round him with friendly claps on the back, with praises and congratulations, as he leisurely drew his jacket above his racing dress, and took off to toss back the hair from his flushed forehead.

"He is not a bit like a Frenchman," said the young fellow with incredulity truly British, as he turned to stand near him. "He cannot be a Frenchman, impossible!"

"Can any good thing come out of—et cetera," he laughed the young fellow he addressed. "No, I thought—that's to say, half a Frenchman. I thought his mother was English or Scotch, or something Irish, for all I know."

Piers studied him for a moment, and then, wandering away into a labyrinth of perplexing solitary reflections, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and a well-known voice, exclaiming his name, fell upon his ear.

"Ashton, my dear fellow, how are you?" he turned instantly—

"The llusson! I am so glad to see you at last."

"My dear boy, I am delighted to see you. I did not know you were coming up this term. When will you arrive?"

"Only yesterday," said Piers. "Sedley, I remember him at Bowen's—Tip Sedley, he brought me here."

"Sedley—ah, yes, I remember him. But where do you not find me out?"

"I did not know where to look for you," said Piers shyly, and hesitating as he spoke. He did not

give his true reason, which was this—that with a reserve and backwardness characteristic of him, he had shrunk from calling on Frederick Thellusson until they had met accidentally in this way; until he felt sure the elder man had not forgotten the shy boy in whom he took an interest, to whom he showed kindness, and had left three forms below him at old Bowen's years ago. There could be no doubt about it now, however.

"I knew you, Ashton, at once; and you knew me?"

"Yes, directly; you are not a bit changed, only——"

"Not so brown, I dare say, as when I used to do this sort of thing," Thellusson continued, nodding towards the race-course.

"Yes, you are much thinner and paler, I see, now, but——"

"Life is a thing that wears one, boy," said the other lightly. "It does not matter, however, so long as one has strength to go on, and work out a good day."

"I dare say you over-work immensely," continued Piers.

"No. What *can* be over-work, dear fellow, while there is so much to be done? A man's whole strength, and a man's whole lifetime, after all, would leave so little mark. So much to be done, so short the time to do it, so small the results. Still, we must not mind that either; nothing for it, but to go on. '*I work my work—all its results are—Thine.*'"

His face lit up as he spoke, a sweet eager smile playing over his delicate features, and shining in his soft clear eyes, making the spare dark countenance beautiful for a moment.

"But, my dear fellow," he said, as with his hand on Piers's shoulder they turned together towards the field again, "we have got into the depths already. That was a pretty bit of running, was it not, that brought down our flag?"

"It was: wonderful for a Frenchman. I have

seen Eldon Rivers run before, but I never expected to see him beaten."

"No; but he has found his match: that boy runs like a young antelope. A fine fellow, is he not?"

"Yes, he is wonderfully well made," said Piers admiringly; "not an ounce of superfluous weight. Look at him now, vaulting, every muscle in play, every bit of effort telling fair. Capital! and a Frenchman, too!" he added half discontentedly.

"Oh, he is only part French," said Tellusson. "His mother was a Scotchwoman. I fancy that yellow hair of his, and those blue eyes, have more Campbell in them than Lescar. But he is an accomplished, charming fellow; you must know him. What is your college—Trinity? To be sure; then he is one of yours."

"Can he play and sing?" exclaimed Piers with no little disgust.

"Yes, charmingly; but that does not prevent him, as you see, from vaulting the nine-foot rail, and discoursing upon *la patrie* and Voltaire. Ah! here he comes: let me introduce you to him."

Piers had no time to remember that he hated strangers, and was shy and sulky with them, and that he hated a Frenchman worst of all; for in another moment the introduction was effected. He had raised his cap with reluctant British bashfulness in answer to the foreigner's polite salute, and then—he did not know *how*, he never could tell from which side came first the electric current of sympathy, whose glance first brightened as it met the other's, who was the first to relax into a friendly smile, but he found himself clasping Lescar's hand with a warm and eager cordiality, and looking at him with a soft glow in his own dark shaded eyes. It was so utterly irresistible, the brightness of that energetic face.

Piers's first question was characteristic.

"How did you learn to vault so well—in France?"

he said, with a beautifully contemptuous emphasis upon the obnoxious name.

Victor laughed.

"I learnt in Germany," he replied. "I was brought up there."

"Oh!" Perhaps that explained it, but Piers had a true British schoolboy's ignorance of the habits also of a German school.

"We had a gymnasium, and a regular professor at Heidelberg; but I did not know I could run till I came here."

"You have found it out now, at all events. Eldon Rivers does not often meet his match."

"Ah, a chance thing; he will probably beat me on Wednesday. How splendidly he goes, does he not?—and he is much surer than I am."

"You ran very steadily throughout."

"Yes, to-day; but it is a case of fits and starts with me," he answered, taking his cap off again, and tossing back his hair from his forehead. "I cannot always get my steam up, and Rivers never seems to go down."

"He is a man of a central idea," remarked Thellusson. "He has a fine powerful soul, has Eldon Rivers, and he has given it all, at present, to the cause of athletic success. As our old trainer used to say, 'books does throw out the muscular balance terrible.'"

"Yes, it is so," said Lescar. "I cannot run anything like so steadily when I have been studying up something very hard the night before. I suppose the muscular force does work off, more or less, in the brain-effort."

"A versatile genius cannot give its powers to everything at once," laughed Thellusson, "and we should not like all of *you* to run itself out in the long jump or the two-mile race, Lescar. I have been telling Ashton of your lecture, the other night; from what I remember of *him* in old days, I think he would have been an appreciative auditor of all your ideas."

Victor turned to Piers again, and looked up at him with a questioning glance.

"Are you going to join the Society?" he asked.

"I hope so," said Piers, "if you will all have me."

"Of course we will. There is a vacancy, is there not, Thellusson? Bonar does not come back this term; we are only eleven."

"Yes, just what I recollected," said Thellusson.

"And you, of course, have the first vote as President," said Victor.

"I have; and it shall be Ashton's, if, after a night's hearing of us, he chooses to take it."

"I do not think there is much doubt about that," said Piers, cordially; for his shyness seemed melting from him under Victor's bright sympathetic eyes and Frederick Thellusson's kindly voice.

"Here come a lot of us," exclaimed Victor, pausing as he turned to go. "Here are Hilford, and Stoneleigh, and Henry Vere. Ashton can be introduced to the mystic circle at once."

"Yes, that is famous," said Thellusson; "come along."

And Piers had no time to hang back and feel miserable, for Thellusson's hand was passed within his arm, and Victor sauntered on his other side, and together they drew him towards a group of men who had paused as they came along the river bank to watch the last vaulting match that was going on in the distance across the field.

There was every variety of men on that ground that evening; for Cambridge produced—then, as ever—men of every type, men of every kind of promise. Men, whose infinite contrasts of history in the future lay evident, though undeveloped, as you watched the traces of taste and character already strongly marked; and they grouped together, making this sporting-field a fair example of Cambridge as a whole.

Athletic men, boating-men, reading-men, hunting-men, and men, like Sedley, of wine-parties and bull-

dogs, crowded the ground, and fell naturally into groups together, as the sports were concluded, and sympathetic conversational tastes drew each man towards the fellow of his mind.

The currents of taste were so seldom mingled or confused, that each stood out in clear comparison; a versatile, combining nature, like Victor's, was rare.

So now, as he lingered with Piers and Thellusson, he seemed gradually to forget the vaulting and the racing—to lose all conscious interest in his own success, and his eyes lit up with a new keen ardor, a look of refined intellectuality coming into his mobile face, as one of the group, a sharp-featured, sallow-cheeked man, attacked him on some point of dubious authority in his statements of the night before.

Victor answered him with playful piquancy, in the same tone in which he spoke; and one after another joining in, they argued on. Meanwhile, Piers, with Thellusson's hand still leaning on his arm, was presented successively to the whole group, and quite forgot his own idiosyncrasies as he met, one after another, each keen face turned to him with the kindly greeting of fellowship insured for him by Thellusson's guarantee.

"Ashton to be one of them," seemed an accepted fact.

"Chapel on in two minutes," shouted some one suddenly, as the beautiful peal of evening bells burst from chapel and college and belfry in every corner of the old town.

"We must disperse;" and they turned,—the whole party together.

Men were hurrying back now, the sports were over; moving in crowds, or loitering in knots of twos and threes, as the bells called them,—some to chapel, some to—many another thing.

CHAPTER X.

DREAMS—AGAIN.

PIERS, as their groups moved onwards found himself by Victor Lescar's side. Some other man claimed Frederick's attention, and Piers was left solitary. He turned with a quick spontaneous feeling of pleasure towards Victor, whose countenance had quite lost the eager brightness of the victorious youth. It wore an expression of gravity, his eyes thoughtful : the trace of the last, the intellectual conflict was still upon him.

He smiled as Piers turned.

"A curious experience, one's first day at college, is it not? Do you think you will like it?"

"I am sure I shall," said Piers, the musical quality seeming to draw him out from his reserve.

"It seems to me," he continued, "to be the best thing for which I have longed for ages—ever since I knew Frederick Thellusson at Bowen's; the same place, I mean, where people think about the things that are like."

"Men think of every kind of thing here, Victor; "and nearly every man in his own right, though a certain number, of course, do not think of anything at all."

"I am sure all of *you* do," continued Piers, laughing, as he indicated the group preceding them.

"Yes; we of the Society are all expected to have different views on something; odd and varied enough so long as they are. I scarcely expected, coming as I did from the depth—as one may call it—of German reflection at Königsstadt, and from a nest of curious thinkers at Paris too, to find such a concentration of ideas and thought, such a nucleus of germinating ideas, as *is here at this moment.*"

"You mean ideas political or scientific?"

"Neither, and both. I mean human ideas. Why should men be parcelled off into systems of thought in that way, each concentrating his mind on his own small branch; as if science, art, or politics, as you would interpret the words, were any of them to regenerate the world? Any *one* of them: and yet—the man of science feels his hypothesis of obscure possibilities to be all sufficient; the man of art talks to you of the influence of beauty; the politician finds the key-note in the fact of your being, as it happens, a Tory or a Whig. Do you not find it so? And *what* we want is the secret that will embrace and concentrate all knowledge, all beauty, and the power of national organization we call politics, towards the highest and most universal human good."

"Ah!" exclaimed Piers with a gasp of delighted excitement, "that is just how it always comes to me. I did not think another man existed in the world who had these ideas but myself. Universal,—that is what I want: all else seems so puerile, so small."

"What? The efforts of philanthropy and government, you mean. Yes, the new life is but just born: men have not learnt to stand upright yet: very few have got above their individual selves."

"So few!—none, none!" exclaimed Piers.

"Ha! I have gone off somehow on my topics," said Victor, "and have bored you already with what most of the fellows call, when they hear me, 'the unknown tongues.'"

"I think I follow what you mean."

"I wonder how we came to talk about it. What is it? I think we could understand each other. Will you come in? Here we are. This is my room. Where are you—in the corridor above? Come in, do."

They had sauntered into the quadrangle as they talked, and, eager and engrossed in their discussion and in each other, they had separated from the rest, and walked side by side up the stone staircase, Piers

scarce noticing where they went, while Victor led him instinctively to the door of his own room.

"Come in," he repeated, and Piers entered.

It was an apartment that revealed immediately infinite little traits of the versatile character of its owner. It announced his artistic tastes. There in the corner was the piano, so obnoxious (though he had almost forgotten it) in Piers's eyes; over the mantel-piece a French sword, a mask, and fencing-foils; on one side a buffet, bearing racing-cups, silver boats, and sundry athletic trophies; on the walls some beautiful prints, historical, poetical, and patriotic; among them, above Victor's own writing-table, a photograph of Le Grand St. Marteau, and the little chapel there, in the Protestant cemetery, where the best part of the boy's heart still lay.

On marble pedestals stood choice models of characteristic bits of Grecian statuary—"The Athlete," "The Quoit-players," "The Wrestlers;" and in a conspicuous place, a beautiful bust of Mazzini.

Piers pointed to this immediately.

"That tells a political tale," he said.

"You mean, reveals a political bias. Well, partly so. I sympathize with him in many points; I admire him in more."

"And combined sympathy and admiration for Mazzini constitute——"

"A revolutionist, you were going to say. No, not necessarily. There is so much to call forth sympathy for himself: that passionate tenderness for his beautiful country; the grandeur, so unselfish and so high-strung, of his idealism; the disappointment with men and motives that met him, repeated again and again, from the hour of his first patriotic action, when he joined the Carbonari, to the last effort he made for Italy on Italian soil. The instruments were *always* so unworthy of the master's hand; the highest goal of their aspirations so far below his sublime thought. *And now, there is a composure and grand simplicity*

about him that could never be sympathetic with the sanguinary excitement of the common revolutionist."

"Now?" repeated Piers; "have you seen him?"

"Yes; in the course of a mission I undertook lately for a cause I serve, I was introduced to his presence. And since he let me talk to him, and since I heard him speak, I have admired and revered him as *one* of the men who most embody my ideal of a champion of humanity—one who can look beyond himself and his own career, beyond the trivial reflection of consequence upon his own life, towards the hereafter—the universal. Every subtle thought, every well-weighed word, every habit of life, speak, in all their humility and their simplicity, the great Conspirator. Only great, because conspiring for right against wrong, and for light against darkness—the man whose obscure existence, there in London, is setting living and indelible marks upon his age. You learn to appreciate the real thing—the true, giant thing—the more you see of the smaller ones. The great conspirators are a rare species; the small ones abound."

"Is he in London now?"

"Yes, living in Brompton. I believe he goes to Italy, however, immediately—under a feigned name, of course. I hope he will be left in peace to stay there, by those blue waves that wash his beloved land."

"Fancy having seen him," continued Piers, thoughtfully. "And, after all, you do not call yourself a revolutionist?"

"Perhaps you would call me one; but there are so many questions involved in that name. I am a revolutionist in one sense, and the cause I serve aims certainly at revolution, but one to reach other things than the words 'Crown' and 'Government' describe, Ashton, and concerns itself with more widely human interests than the mere subversion of the reigning powers in a single State. Do you care much for these questions? Do you concern yourself deeply with the *condition of men*?"

"There is nothing else I do care for much," Piers answered. "I never think of anything but politics in that sort of light—how things are to be put to rights; but I do not arrive at much theory in the matter yet."

"Ah! I see we shall have many a talk," exclaimed Victor. "Can we not tell each other our ideas? Can not you tell me how the dream has come to you. And I will tell you (but quietly, '*dans l'oreille*,' as we say) a dream of—France. I suppose I may tell you at least, I will write and ask if I may. I wonder what makes me talk to you now, Ashton: I wonder what has brought us together to-night. What is it I like to talk to you. Are you going?" he went on impulsively.

"Yes, I must be off. It is late, surely."

"Come again, then, will you not?" continued Victor, with that winning voice and manner of his, singularly un-English, and so curiously in contrast with Piers's undemonstrative ways. "Come back and, ah! we shall meet this evening. Thellusso! takes you to the *conversazione*, does he not?"

"Yes, I believe I am to go."

"Adieu then—or rather, *au revoir*."

Thus these two met. This was the first evening and the first of many long confabulations they had together on ideas—on men—on things. Thus Piers broke his resolution against friendship; thus he began the experience of his college life,—an experience *intended* to be lengthy, *destined* to be very short; but of which the influence on his history and character was considerable.

His friendship (springing from that first evening's conversation) with Victor Lescar accounted for part of this; while the curious and varied circle of associates in which they both spent their college-term accounted for more.

CHAPTER XI.

DAS GLAUBEN'S KAMPF.

WHEN Victor described the circle in which he lived at Cambridge, as a nucleus of strong, new, though embryonic thought, he was echoing the enthusiastic sentiments with which minds, now fully matured and high in the ranks of literary and political distinction, look back to the influence, at once delightful in experience, life-long in its endurance, which had its spring in the centre of the *Conversazione Society* of the Cambridge apostles.

Like Balzac's "*Conseil de Douze*," a union for mutual encouragement, mutual criticism—perhaps by the force of youth and ardent enthusiasm, like Balzac's, for "mutual admiration" as well,—intellect reflecting intellect, flint striking with steel,—it was often a wonderful coterie of brilliant young minds.

Ten years ago, in the "*Conseil de Douze*" at Cambridge there was thought enough.

When Piers first took his place among them, he had been a week at college. He had got into the swing of his work; he was settling steadily into harness; he was beginning thoroughly to enjoy the life.

For it was "life" almost for the first time to him—sympathetically and intellectually satisfying.

It was very delightful; young, vigorous minds, hungering daily for new mental food, and rich plentitude to meet them; then companionship winning upon him in spite of himself. They were all so kind and hearty: Frederick Thellusson full of brotherly interest, always gentle and grave; and Victor Lescar, with him morning, noon, and far into every night, charming that reserved and silent nature, like a constant and fresh-springing current of sweet water to a thirsty man.

Piers grew, in spite of himself, eager, interested and happy.

One evening stood out especially clear in his recollection of that Cambridge time. Partly because it was the proud moment when he found himself seated in the mystic circle, a duly elected member of the *Conversazione Society*. And still more because words were spoken in the Society rooms that evening, the memory of which, for him and for Victor, never seemed to die.

It was the night of Frederick Thellusson's lecture and men were excited and expectant. There had been much said lately in this council-chamber on the subject of "Liberty;" it had been treated from many points of view, spiritual and political, and much curiosity was felt as to the views that would be adopted to-night.

Thellusson was known to have strong, well-formed opinions, and some peculiar to himself, and it was moreover, suspected that he had listened with little sympathy to much that had been spoken of late. To get him to lecture at all was a great thing. He was a thinker, a writer, an active worker in his own line but, although president of the Society, his speech was rare. He had no oratorical talent, though he could express his own views with energy and force.

At last, with a quiet sparkle in his dark, soft eyes and amid a murmur of greeting, Thellusson rose. There was silence for a moment, as the applause died. The circle of faces, keen and expectant, was turned upon him; every eye looked up to his—the hush of an awaiting moment; then, without hesitation, he began

"When Leonidas led those three hundred of Sparta in that glorious rally for their country's cause, the war cry that rang throughout Greece, inspiring his little band with the superhuman valor that won for them immortal names, was the word—*Liberty*.—Liberty! *the shout rose* from shore to shore of ancient Hellas

the soldiers of Thermopylæ answered with their life's blood ; the heroes of Salamis and Platæa caught up the echo ; the mighty conquerer was driven back to his Lydian city on the Pactolus ; the Persian perished, and Greece remained free.

"When the pavement of the Roman senate-house was stained with a crimson stream from a Cæsar's bosom, and the great Dictator fell beneath the assassin's blow, the shout that rose unbidden from the hearts of the Roman populace, penetrating the walls of the senate-house, drowning the wary accents of Mark Anthony's voice, was again—Liberty !

"From age to age, from nation to nation, the cry is echoed, caught up and tossed back again, Liberty ! liberty !—the passionate necessity of the human soul.

"In Greece its flag floated, often brave and beautiful, cheering into a transient flicker the pure national life that was doomed to die. In Rome it was unfurled in many a vain protest against the crushing power of national decadence and enervation that came rolling irresistibly on.

"In northern latitudes, among rugged and simpler nations, it lived earlier, lived stronger, lived with a vitality and energy all-animating and irrepressible. The standard was firmly planted in Britain centuries ago ; it has waved over America ; it has been the watchword of Switzerland ; it is the hope of Italy ; it is the bitter need of Spain ; it is the word of life unto the people ; it is spirit and power, it is the keynote of nobility and regeneration, through all the infinite forms in which national decadence has overtaken man.

"Liberty ! the old beautiful word. To be noble, to be pure, to develop or achieve his high destiny, man must be free.

"Liberty ! The echo of that ancient cry of the patriot has not died among us yet, individually, or, among the nations. Italy is still in bondage, and is struggling now, deep sympathy watching eagerly for

her success. Spain is in heavy chains ; but she, too, is moving ; restless and murmuring, the foreshadowing symptoms of the struggle upon her, like a mighty creature who awakens slowly, but will rise up, when her hour comes, and shake herself free.

“ Can we account for this—this restless, undying passion we still see swaying men ? Can we see the origin, the intention, the destiny, of this life in our hearts, that would struggle on towards a further achievement, when there is nothing further to be done ? —that would urge us towards fresh struggle and agitation, when the only result would be freedom pushed to anarchy, and tranquillity and reason resigned for turmoil and dismay ?

“ We would be champions still of a new liberty. We pine for the patriot's sword ; we would enlist under a patriot's flag. We cannot let it die, that old, glorious enthusiasm ; we cannot admit that an age has come when there is no further scope for this, the highest passion of our hearts ; it is vital, fervent, strong and eager still.

“ Are the days gone for ever when battles may be fought with patriotic fervor for human freedom ; and have we reached so perfect and complete a state that there is no more use for the soldiers of liberty among men ? Is there no army, no leader, and have we no liberty-struggle, no national redemption, to be accomplished still ?

“ All crusades have had their leader, and I am not speaking metaphorically, but from my own convictions, the words of practical historic fact, when I tell you that there *has* been a Leader among men whose crusade is still unaccomplished, whose enemies are still unconquered, whose glorious dream of liberty is still unachieved. And I am not speaking in language of poetic figure, when I assert that He is still sounding his war-call in every heart among us, and that these passionate feverish yearnings of our spirits are our *hearts' unconscious* answer to his message and his call.

"He came to a nation in bonds ; He came under a rule of tyranny as dark and cruel as the world has ever known. He spoke the words of a freedom that would be world-wide and undying ; He pointed to victories destined to regenerate man.

"I will speak of Him *here* but in one sense. I will not soar to the sublime heights where the mysteries of His existence are veiled among things spiritual and divine ; I will not strive to penetrate the depths which He sounded in the hidden secrets of the destiny of our race.

"Here, among men of diverse professions, of opposite opinions, of infinite grades of thought, I will point to Him *only* as a Leader and Commander among the people,—the greatest philosophic Teacher, the purest Patriot, that has ever appeared among men.

"A glorious Leader, with weapons of a novel kind. 'Put up thy sword into its sheath ;' 'ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you *free* ;' 'redeemed from bondage into a glorious liberty.' Other champions of their nations' freedom drew forth their swords for bloodshed,—sent the fiery cross flashing ominously over the lands. He drew no sword, He unfurled no conspicuous banner, He had no far-sounding war-cry ; but He left his *words*—words simple and easy to be understood,—and they have filtered down through generations, they have flowed gently but irresistibly from shore to shore, and they have gathered together a vast army of patriots, nerved with love, heroism, and humanity, ready to *die*.

"My Leader's appeal is to the heart and sleeping conscience of man. His war-call may be condensed into the language of that Roman slave ; for his battle-field embraces every habitation of humanity, His foes are found in every enemy of our race. Suffering, poverty, ignorance, and sin,—these are His foes ; in the war against them He calls his soldiers to be ready to outpour their blood as He did, and to lay down *all* the *sweetness of their lives*.

"My friends, we are still in this slavery ; we are still panting to be free. Our brethren lie still in darkness ; heavy chains of bitter suffering still bruise the limbs of the children of men. This bondage lies ever upon this, our own nation, that in one sense we justly boast so free. Free we are ; liberty we have, full and sufficient in all that regards forms of government and systems of control ; but ignorance crowds around us, still crying for light ; poverty and pauperism still shame our opulence ; sickness and crime still wring from our people many a needless tear ; and sin remains unconquered,—it wastes and consumes us still.

"See to these things ; let idle questions die. Look into that glorious liberty our true Leader has announced to us, and think deeply what it *may* mean. Enter His lists, join in His struggle, and let it be seen that the old patriotism, the old glorious enthusiastic fire, has not died out, is not wasting itself in excitement or selfish folly, is not expending its power in theories dangerous and false, but is living still, full, as of old, of high aims, of sublime aspirations and deep humanity, ready to rush into the battle for liberty, for light, keen as ever to conquer, or willing as of old to lay down, in the weariness of a daily combat, or 'neath some sudden mortal blow, the life that has been wholly devoted to the great cause that is true liberty indeed."

"Thellusson's the only fellow in the Society whom one could stand to have preaching like that," said one man, as, later in the evening, after some further discussion, they all sauntered together from the room.

"Yes, he airs his own views ; but there is something one does not mind about him," said another. "I like to see his quiet face lighting up, and I like to listen to him, too, just now and then."

"Perhaps ; but if the philosophic discourses of the Society were not more profound or more unorthodox than his, we might throw open the room for the *Sunday-school* children to learn the way they should go.

He starts from all the old ground of non-proven hypotheses. There is not much research or power of logic needed to follow his ideas."

"He'll do nobody any harm in his generation," said another man lightly; and then, with a few more remarks and some curt good-nights, they separated to their respective rooms.

CHAPTER XII.

CELESTIAL LAYS.

"COME back with me to my room, will you?" said Victor to Piers. "Come, will you not?"

"I thought of going to Frederick," said Piers.

"No, do not do that; he is tired. I know he wants to be alone now; he always does after one of those inspirations of his. Besides, come with me, I want you," he added, impulsively putting his hand within the other's arm. "I want to talk to you, *mon cher*. I feel I must talk to some one to-night, and you are the only man I care to have. Come, do."

And Piers went with him.

It was impossible for him, in the least, to explain to himself the wonderful fascination with which this French boy was winning upon him day by day. The tender grace, the naïve simplicity and boyishness, that distinguished Victor in so peculiar a degree, seemed to come over Piers with a force of influence that astonished him. The current of sympathetic and devoted friendship had certainly sprung up between the two, with that enthusiasm, rapid and enduring, which is a gift only granted to—our youth.

Those who will have friendships, must make them

young ! then it is that they spring up, strong, bright, and very beautiful, second only in their power and sweetness to the spring of love.

"Come with me," went on Victor ; and he drew Piers, forgetful of the night's work still before him, into his room.

"Sit down," he said. "There !" as Piers threw himself into the big chair ; "now, talk to me." He turned away to the open window, however, and continued talking to himself. "How splendid the stars are over the dull old Cam there ! And, look out ; can you see Luna rising over the tower of St. Saviour's ? Splendid, is it not ? But you never have a sky here like we have in France. Do not get up : sit still, will you not ? Do you mind if I play to you ?"

And he disappeared behind the piano.

"I never arrive at understanding how a man can play," Piers exclaimed. This playing was the one thing he never could get over in his friend ; "I never arrive at understanding it."

"I am afraid you arrive at hearing it pretty often," answered Victor, as he struck a few chords. "I fear I often penetrate my own ceiling, and, by consequence, your floor."

"I do not mind it," said Piers ; and he would have been as great a bear as he liked to think himself, if he had.

These chords, soft and beautiful, struck with a touch clear, vigorous, and delicate, must have influenced any soul irresistibly, as they did his, with a soothed and delicious sense of their completeness and harmony.

They were both silent for a moment, as Victor struck chord after chord ; and then suddenly he began to sing, in German, with a ringing, vigorous voice. He sang, from *La Motte-Fouqué*, Ewald's song on the grave of Aslauga's knight. The translation would be something in this way :—

"Listening to celestial lays,
Bending thine unclouded gaze
On the pure and living Light,
Thou art blest, Aslauga's knight.

"Send us from thy bower on high
Many an angel melody,
Many a vision soft and bright,
Aslauga's dear and faithful knight."

He paused a moment, then struck vigorously the chords of another theme, and began again. This time Piers understood the language as well as the spirit of the song :—

"The minstrel boy to the wars is gone,
In the ranks of death you'll find him;
His father's sword he has girded on,
And his wild harp slung behind him.
'Land of song,' said the warrior bard,
'Though all the world betray thee,
One sword at least thy rights shall guard,
One faithful heart shall praise thee.'

"The minstrel fell; but the foeman's chain,
Could not bring that proud soul under!
The harp he loved ne'er spoke again,
For he tore its chords asunder,
And said, 'No chains shall sully thee,
Thou soul of love and bravery;
Thy tones were made for the pure and free,
And shall never sound in slavery.'"

Victor rose from the piano instantly, as he finished the last line, and came forward to where Piers was sitting.

"I can understand that so well," he said; "cannot you? The maddening sense of ignominy under defeat, the frenzy that tore the harp-strings and rushed into the battle to die. I could not fight in a losing cause; could you, Piers?"

"I do not know. I suppose a man would rather

die in the moment of humiliation, than live to know himself defeated."

"That is it. I am fond of that song; I used to sing it often when I first came. But the men took to calling me the 'minstrel boy;' and one earns a name here easier than one loses it. But it expresses something in me to myself; something in the unsounded caverns of possibility within me. No, I could not live to lose: I would lose, and die. I can imagine soon crushing out one's own life, breaking one's weapons wrenching the sweet harp-strings asunder, and flinging them away in despair, far sooner than I could confess my cause a lost one, and myself a defeated man."

"You look more a man to conquer than to be conquered," said Piers. "You always succeed in everything you try to do. I should call you eminently a winning man."

"Ah! there are so many sides to me, and so many possibilities in the vagaries of my life. But I like these sweet stirring ballads: I always think what must have been, the first time when men heard them sung by the composers themselves. Imagine so at a Cambridge wine-party, when Ben Jonson would break out with his 'Drink to me only;' or Tom Moore, with his 'Minstrel Boy,' coming fresh upon everybody. I do not know why I should sing that song to-night. Do not think it frivolous of me, Ashton, to sit down to troll a ballad, after listening to such words as Thellusson has spoken to us. In reality, the song was inspired, at the moment, by something in Thellusson himself."

And they were silent again; Victor humming, in a low tone, his favorite song.

Long after, when years had passed, and events had hurried on, Piers recalled often that evening, remembering at once the singer, his words, the subject of his friendly enthusiasm, and his song. The song may have been sung by "other lips:" all else, how changed!

"How often," said Victor, suddenly, "I have heard the very words he spoke to-night, again and again, in such different scenes, from such different men."

"Abroad?" said Piers.

"Yes; long ago, in my early youth, I first heard them in Paris; then in Germany again, the same thing taken from a less spiritual, a more philosophical point of view; and now, lately. It is wonderful! it is the same language, the utterance of the same inner life."

"I do not understand you yet, Victor," Piers answered. "You often puzzle me, and still I seem to have instinctive sympathy with every word you say. What is it you talk of? What is the language of the new life? Cannot you show it to me?—cannot you let me know it too?"

"It is what Frederick spoke of—the love that is to bind nation to nation, strength to strength, hand to hand, and man to man,—the life currents of a new sympathy, that is to unite the world,—the victories of a bloodless war, that are to win happiness for all."

"But how?"

"It would take long to tell you," he said. "And, as yet, I scarce know if I may. But it is a glorious dream, Piers, when you think how men have suffered, and have wept: it is a splendid thought to think that it may all be, one day, no more."

"Tell me, Victor, tell me," Piers urged him still; but Victor would not continue.

He went to the piano, and played in versatile strains, and then came back and conversed again, but lightly now, and of changed topics—of their studies and their favorite books, and of many things; and so they talked, and played, and discoursed together far into the night.

It was only just as they were parting that Lescar again referred to his former words. He had taken Piers's hand in his with the impulsive tenderness of his

nature, and he put one hand upon his friend's shoulder and looked into his face.

"I do not like *not* to tell you everything," he said, "I do not like to keep anything from you, my friend; but I have written, and, when leave comes to me to do so, I will speak to you of all that lies in my prospects, of all that lives in my hopes and in my heart. Adieu, *mon cher*."

It was a happy and delightful time that these two enjoyed together, as their friendship grew strong and matured, as months went on, and they drank at the same springs of thought, explored the same rich treasure-mines, mingled the currents of their intellects, or flashed their keen wits in sharp mental skirmish.

How that gay, versatile temperament lit up Piers's sombre spirits! How those sunny smiles seemed to sweeten his shadowy heart! How forgotten were his old austere, misanthropical schemes of self-isolation.

Now and then Victor irritated him by starting some vagary of sentiment or opinion, running directly against some strong prejudice which Piers thought they shared.

He never *would* take life, for instance, as a habit, "*au grand sérieux*," in the solemn and somewhat ponderous way that was Piers's habit to view it.

"There are beauty and brightness and music," he would say, "in this world of ours, though there be sorrow and sadness as well. But the sun shines, and the spirit reflects it bright and sparkling: let us be thankful and rejoice."

Music always came to him, when any stirring thought woke up the sensibility of his being. It flowed forth in music varied as himself; and Piers had to listen, often discontented, though half resigned.

But it did irritate him sometimes, for Victor had a way of answering with music, or responding with a song, when Piers wanted solemn argument and a logical deduction from facts.

CHAPTER XIII.

ADONÄIS AND ATHANASE.

THUS again and again, through many months, they discoursed together—that pure, beautiful, dreamy nature mingling with the darker currents and the gloomy misanthropy of his friend,—sometimes of their books, often of art, of music, of philosophy, of religion, of love. Victor often rallied Piers's British gravity and the depressing tendency of his views; but still he revered his high standards and his lofty though unpractical aims, and he admired his friend in all his stern sombre contrast to himself.

Some one had christened Victor "Adonäis." He in his turn called Piers "Prince Athanase;" and he used to sing of him to music of his own composing, in tones of comical amusement, the description in Shelley's words—

"I know a youth that, as with toil and travel,
Has grown quite grave and grey before his time,
Nor any could his restless grief unravel.

* * * * *

For nought of ill his heart could understand,
But pity and wild sorrow for the same."

Piers used to try to be angry, but he never could succeed.

At last, after many months, the day came when Victor had letters from Paris, and in them answers to the request he had made for permission to enrol Piers Ashton in the secret Association to which he himself had vowed his life. And he told him at length of Auber Dax, of Faustine, of Henri Tolberg, of Hanker, Varlin, Duprés, and of many others. He unveiled for him *the hidden background* in his history and position

—the background which had colored so much in his own sentiments and words. He described to him the whole scheme of the "Universal."

He told Piers how the vision had arisen in the dreamy brain of old Auber Dax. He painted in bright colors the beauty of that dream of Auber's—the philanthropy that was to animate and unite the divided children of men. He told him of the journey to London; how he, and Dax, and Tolberg, had trod the crowded streets friendless and solitary; of the earnest thoughts, and Auber's soaring aspiration, they stood in the Exhibition and looked down on the people from under the great dome. He told of the visit to the Golden Ball in Percy street, of Dax's speech, of the reception which he met with among the English agitators and the foreign exiles hidden there. He told Piers further how these several years had passed, since they first brought their scheme to England. How it had extended widely, had developed fast, and was now far-spreading and strong.

Lescar had seen little of its inner working for the last few years. He was going in for high honors at Cambridge, and meant to win them; so terms and calculations alike had been devoted to his philosophy and mathematics, and he had let politics wait. He was true to the heart's core, however, ready and alert to join them with mind and soul directly this present stage in his career was over.

What his future would be, he told Piers, he was quite uncertain. His uncle had left him money, but he might be called on to devote it all. He had taken for a learned profession, but the Association might claim him as a leader of the "Proletaire;" in which case he would become a *soi-disant* workman. His father wrote from Algeria, inviting him to join his regiment, there, take a commission in his own regiment, and serve his country with his sword.

But how could he, he said, when he realized with conviction so strong, that his country's greatest batt

must be fought at home—the great human battle, to win a time of rest and plenty, a golden age for men.

It seemed beautiful to Piers, as Victor described it ! It was large and world-wide in its vastness, this glorious scheme. It embraced the whole human race ! This, then, was the realization of the great career for which he had darkly pined. Here was a cause worthy of a life's devotion ; here was a path of glory along which he too, surely, might be a leader of men. While others would incite him to small and puerile efforts to reform a handful of people, such as the tenants of his own estates, here was a scheme that would embrace them also in its grand ubiquity—would gather them as a handful of sand among the vast deserts that would blossom through their Cause !

It was the true realization at length, Victor told him, of the teachings of the great King ! this was the army of Thellusson's Leader ; this was the warfare of which he had spoken—this vast bloodless crusade in the cause of good.

Theirs of the "Universal" was the one true way. Hand would join hand, heart to heart, nation to nation, all over the inhabited globe ; all blended in vast fellowship, all quickened with a mutual enthusiasm of humanity, all joining to assist. A great brotherhood, a vast society would ere long clasp round the earth, cover every land, unite all the people in one. And, then—what then ? But Victor could not tell, what then—for he did not know ? Did any one know ? Did the Universalists know themselves ? No matter : they would *be* now ; what they would *do* was hereafter !

It is impossible to dwell longer on this part of the history of Piers Ashton and Victor Lescar.

Piers stayed on through all that term at Cambridge. He studied, and did well. He attended the Society, and spoke there. He listened to much speaking, and joined in much argumentative discourse.

He heard Victor Lescar lecture on Heinrich Heine :

heard him interpret that wild spirit which, forty years ago, sounded its strange blast, quickening the life of central Europe with a fervent and restless power. In fact, on all possible topics he imbibed views, strong and forcibly conveyed, always one-sided, often eminently false. And in converse with Victor on each different lecture, they distilled, by comparison and free criticism, theories from every one of them, to fit those particular views which were their own.

Altogether the frame of mind may be conceived at which Piers Ashton had arrived, when, towards the end of the term, he received the following letter from Sir John Graeme. They had, of course, maintained an occasional correspondence throughout the term; but this was an epistle of an especial nature. It is given as it stood—and Piers's peculiar fitness at that period may be imagined, to respond, with acquiescence, to the advice and requests therein contained.

“THE OLD TOWERS, *July* —.

“MY DEAR PIERS,

“Your first term of college life is now drawing to a close, and I think, therefore, that the time has come, when I may with discretion write to you a few pages in reference to our last conversation in this place. You may readily conceive, remembering what passed between us on that occasion, that you have since been much in my mind.

“I am at this crisis of your history deeply concerned on your account. I recognize in you the goodness of heart, the warmth of disposition, and the real nobility of sentiment from which your opinions spring. I at the same time regret to recognize a tendency towards certain unfortunate hallucinations that are by no means *new*. Your tone of opinion when you conversed with me evinced a strong bias towards a visionary and Utopian philanthropy.

“I am now anxiously concerned to know that my *hopes have been realized*; that a few months of fur-

ther observation, a term passed among enlightened and cultivated men, and the gradual maturing of your own powers have sufficed to establish your appreciation of a sound and well-founded practical policy in the organization of a national government.

"I trust, my dear boy, that you have by this time calmly and dispassionately undertaken the review of the salient and critical points in your position. I trust to the soundness of your heart's true principles to lead you to do this ; and, having done it, I have no doubt you will see clearly the indications of your duty, that you will resolve to accept the influential position, political and social, to which the destinies of inheritance have appointed you, and that all your self-culture and self-development will be pursued towards this object.

"We have had a Conservative sitting for —shire too long ; I look forward with delight to your sitting in his place. I have nursed the county carefully for you. Your landed interest and the influence of your central position, embracing as it does so large a range, will secure through you our success ; —shire will be once more represented by an Ashton of Pollingworth on the Liberal side. Would your dear father had lived to see it !

"I regret the celebration of your majority has been deferred by the Cambridge Term beyond the proper day ; but of course this is inevitable. We must fix an early date as soon as you return from college.

"I enclose a letter from the girls ; doubtless good wishes for many happy returns of the auspicious day. I add mine to theirs ; and remain, my dear Piers, your affectionate friend (guardian no longer),

"JOHN ESSINGWORTH GRAEME."

"MY DEAR PIERS," wrote Gaie, "Donna will not write, so I must ; but she says I may send you her best wishes for many, many happy birthdays. I send

my love ; between old friends like you and me, a privilege of not being out yet ; (Donna is). And we both send you a cigar-case, embroidered with your crest, and a letter-sachet, with a cypher, to carry in your pocket ; it smells nice, and makes your pocket-handkerchief and everything in your pocket smell delicious too ; and then it is very convenient. Donna made it, and she gave me one ; and I always use it to keep letters and any kind of thing. I made the cigar-case. Do you like the gold and red, or the silver and blue best ? That is one subject of my letter. The second is this :—Have you found ‘out “all about it” yet’ ?—about everything I mean—the poverty and all the troubles in the world ? And have you discovered the way to put all to rights ? Mind, you promised to write, and tell us when you did. And please, while you *are* doing this, you might include the defects of nature, by which we are born ignorant of music and German, and are doomed to lessons till we are quite old. Do rectify this, while you are doing a few other minor things. Donna says this letter is ungrammatical and flippant ; so please, Piers, do not subject it to any austere criticism from what Donna calls ‘cultured and critical judgments.’ And, believe me, always your affectionate,

“GRACE ISABEL GRAEME, *alias* ‘GAIE.’”

CHAPTER XIV.

PILGRIMS OF THE DAWN.

WHEN Piers betook himself to Victor’s room, with his letters in one hand and his cigar and card-cases in the other, he found his friend, not, as usual at that hour, improvising behind the piano, but seated at his

writing-table, very earnestly considering an assortment of letters that the evening's post had brought also for him.

He looked up as Piers entered, passed his hand over his brow, as if to call back his thoughts, and laid aside his letters. He saw by the eager expression of Piers's face that he had come for friendly conference, perhaps consultation.

The cigar and card-cases first attracted Victor's notice, and led to the instant betrayal of Gaie's confidence. Her flippant and ungrammatical epistle was submitted to his eyes.

"What a dear little letter!" he said. "And what pretty presents for your '*jour de fête*'?"

He took up one after the other, admired them with a Frenchman's love of pretty things, and fully appreciated the sweet odors on which Gaie had particularly dwelt. He laughed and chattered over them and the warm little letter, for some time, with his usual boyish merriment, quite forgetting for the moment all graver themes.

"They are just like sisters," said Piers, in explanation of their little trophies of affection and remembrance.

Then Victor read Sir John's letter; and upon it, he said, he scarcely liked to say much to his friend.

"I do not like to influence your life strongly one way or another, Piers," he persisted.

"It is not your influence entirely, Victor: I have made the choice for myself."

"Well, dear fellow, I hope all the benefit may be for your own people, along with others, and on your own career. Your guardian is a liberal-minded man; but we cannot expect people who have gone on all their time in old orthodox ways, to understand the outpourings of the grand new life."

"Of course not; that is what I must tell him."

"Yes," said Victor; "and it behoves us now to be strong in our purposes, and that they who have

put their shoulder to the wheel be decided and do not look back. Some of the tests of our faith and devotion are coming upon us, I fancy, from what I hear to-day."

"Have you letters from Paris?"

"Yes; from Père Dax, and from my 'just like a sister,' as you would say—my old playmate of the days of my youth, Faustine. She is his grand-daughter. There has been trouble among them," he continued, taking up Dax's long, close-written letter. "Tolberg and Varlin and a lot of our people have been in St. Pélagie, for insisting on the secret meetings. Rouher's doing, of course. That blindfold government will *not* see the difference between men who mean well or ill, and the consequence has always been just what it is now. In St. Pélagie they have fraternized with a man called 'Chausette,' a red-revolutionary sort of fellow, shut up there for all kinds of dark deeds. He must be a clever man, for he has managed to sow some very poisoned seed among our poor fellows, and they have come out talking of doctrines that would, if admitted among us, ruin the cause. Astonishing how soon a little persecution, a few weeks of bad company, especially in a prison, rears a fine crop of revolutionary principles in the tropical climate of a Frenchman's brain. Certainly, nature must have meant us for a normal condition of barricades."

"But are they getting up a revolution," cried Piers, "against the Empire?"

"No; nonsense!—not getting up, but 'talking out' rather, and as noisily as they can; and the mischief will be simply to us and to themselves. The Empire is not destined to be immortal, that is sure enough; but it will take a greater bouleversement of affairs to shake its foundations than anything that Varlin, Boucher, or poor dear Henri Tolberg are likely to achieve. I shall be glad for you to know Tolberg

some day, Piers ; he is a wonderful fellow—a curious specimen of his class.”

“And shall you go up to town at once, Vic.?”

“I must telegraph to-night that I cannot meet them till I have done my examination. I *must* leave a wrangler, Piers. I could not disappear on the very eve of the great event; the fellows here would say I had called off. I must telegraph to Paris and London, and no doubt they will defer the conference for a week or so. Then, I am their man.”

Piers stood thinking a moment, and turning Sir John's letter thoughtfully in his hand; Victor glanced towards his correspondence again.

He laid aside the old man's letter, and took up the other, written in a delicate foreign feminine hand.

“Faustine says she is anxious about him, and fears he will harass himself until he is ill. *Pauvre vieillard!* I am sure I trust not. He had taken a heavy burden on his hands, and one of which the responsibility will weigh upon him. Ha! little *scélérat*,” he went on, half laughing, “I wonder if these black eyes of hers will do harm or good? She is a regular hot-blooded young revolutionist, is Faustine ; it is only reverence for Dax that keeps her fiery tongue for one moment still. I believe she likes all the prospects of a row. But she wants me over, Piers; she says Père Dax is longing for me. You see, Henri and I have always been the two sons of his spirit to him. I must go,” he added, folding up his letters, and looking with an expression of fixed resolution into his friend's face. “*Mon cher*,” he said, “you stay here; we shall part.”

“Victor, I cannot!” exclaimed Piers at last. “I *cannot* stay here without you. Have I not cast my lot, too, with the Universalists?—with the cause of the people, with the cause of Liberty, just as you have cast in yours? What is the difference between us? Why should there be division in the pathway of our lives?”

There was a moment's silence; the color rushed

over Piers's forehead, and a tender sweet expression crept into Victor's blue eyes.

"Why are you to go forth to action and service," Piers exclaimed again, "and I to remain behind?"

Victor's lip trembled; he seemed unable to answer. They looked into each other's face with eyes sparkling with enthusiasm; they joined hand in hand in a tight and eager grasp; the glow in their young faces spoke the silent interchange of vows of friendship and mutual fealty, indelible and undying; and this was the answer that Piers wrote to Sir John:—

"MY DEAR UNCLE" (so he always had called him).—

"I thank you very much for your letter, which has reached me to-day; I thank you for all the advice it contains, and for the interest in my future which it expresses. I am afraid my answer will disappoint you, but I regret this less than I might otherwise have done, feeling convinced that before very long you will see that my choice of a career is a wise one, and that in acting as I am about to do, I join the strong and advancing party of our age—the party beside which all others will soon become insignificant.

"I agree with much in your letter; and I am glad to feel that your mind is of that liberal and unprejudiced type that easily accommodates itself to the course of events. The wisdom of your judgment will induce you quickly to accept the inevitable advance of new political theories; and I do not fear that, where *all* is clear and developed, we shall stand on opposite political sides.

"At present, however, I cannot expect you to see things as I do. You still look at life from old accepted points of view, while I look from the vantage-ground of information on topics of which you can form little idea. I base my political and social theories on the knowledge of certain facts of which you are in ignorance. I propose to myself a career devoted to a cause *whose existence lies still concealed*—a cause affecting

humanity to a degree wide-spreading beyond every former conception, for the well-being of our race—a cause affecting alike all nations, all classes of men, all differences of creed and language—a cause, of which the grandeur and magnitude can only be appreciated by a thorough knowledge of the sublime and noble nature of its motives and designs—a cause, at last, that I consider worthy the devotion of a man's life. My life, my powers, and if they require it, my fortune, I will lay down at its disposal ; and my only regret in doing so is, that, for the time being, it leads me entirely out of the groove that you propose, and forces me to decline compliance with your requests. Unfortunately, I cannot in any way fall in with your plans ; mine being, for the present, as follows :—

“I leave Cambridge at the end of this term ; my coming back again must remain uncertain, depending on the working of, not alone *national* but *international* events. I proceed to Paris with my friend, Lescar ; when there, will devote myself to the study of the cause which I embrace, and to the effort to understand how I, as an Englishman of property and some influence, can best serve its interests. I may then, probably, make a series of journeys to visit the centres of our Society in different parts of the world, on this side the Atlantic and on the other. Beyond that my future is unknown ; it will be allied to the future of a great Cause, and will advance or fall with it !

“A certain reticence, that is still maintained among the members of this great Society, as to their existence and their workings, forbids me to enter, at present, into details as to its nature or its name. You and all the world will soon learn it ; and I will write you fuller information as soon as I am allowed.

“Meantime, if you wish to hear of me at any time, Darbeau, Banker, Rue Planchette, Paris, will always find me, whether in Europe or further abroad. I think it may not be in accordance with honorable confidence towards my party to give you a more definite address.

I do not know what may be before me, or before any of us ; and I cannot tell what sacrifices the true interests of our glorious Cause may require ; but I am ready.

"On referring to your letter, I see I have overlooked some details.

"First, I entirely agree with you as to the impractical, visionary nature of the theories of such writers as St. Simon, Fourier, Owen and others. I am glad to be able to tell you that our grand scheme of Reformation eschews all of them—the communism of Babeue, the atheism of Voltaire, the socialistic Utopias of St. Simon, and the pernicious theories of Fourier's individualism. A new and brilliant light has flashed across the future of mankind, and *we* live in it—a vision, sublime and glorious, has been conceived indeed ; it will be ours to make it reality.

"I do not think I need say more, except affectionate regards and farewell to Donna and Gaie. I would run down to see them and you before going abroad but circumstances which are beyond my control forbid me. I go with those who are called elsewhere.

"With many grateful thanks for your past kindness, and with the hope that you will still allow me to regard you with the same filial confidence and respect I am, dear uncle,

"Affectionately yours,

"PIERS ANNERLEY ASHTON.

"P.S.—I enclose a reply to Gaie's note, and to the kind congratulations she sends me from Donna and herself.—P. A. A."



CHAPTER XV.

AT THE OLD TOWERS.

SIR JOHN received this letter one morning at the breakfast-table, where he and his girls sat in the pretty dining-room at the Old Towers.

The autumn sun streamed in upon them and their dainty breakfast-table, touching Donna's brown hair with bits of golden light, and warming Gaie's rich coloring to the radiance and freshness of a morning rose.

Donna watched her father earnestly at first, as he read the long letter; but her eyes were presently turned eagerly upon Gaie, who was exclaiming with excitement over hers,—

"I do declare it is too bad! Piers not coming down this autumn—going abroad! Listen, Donna! It is too absurd. May I, papa?—shall I read it aloud?" she added, glancing towards him.

Sir John looked up from his letter, which he was perusing with severe gravity, leaving his breakfast untouched. He laid it down for a moment and paused.

"Yes," he said, "let me hear yours."

"MY DEAR GAIE," she read,—*"Many thanks to both Donna and you for your pretty presents and for your good wishes on my birthday. I should like very much to have gone north, and to have kept it with you; but I cannot do so, as I am going away—abroad, perhaps for a long time. So I will write to say good-bye to both of you. Tell Donna I often remember how we used to talk over everything; and tell her I found out 'all about it' at last. It makes me very happy, now that I have made up my mind; and tell her I see clearly through and through to the*

end of it all. When I am quite certain that I may, and when I quite see into all the details, tell her I will write her a long letter, and describe all about the Cause and its schemes to her ; for I know she is just one who would be interested. Tell her women can have lots to do with it, although she knows *that* is not according to my ideas. I cannot see that they can do much good. But I know of one who is quite a chief person in the management, at the head of the Cause in Paris, and quite a young one too. I cannot imagine it ; but I know it is so. I have seen a letter of hers, and in fact, except the handwriting, which is thin and small, it was not in the least like a woman's letter at all. I think I have written everything to your father, so I need not say more. How is the old greyhound and the colley ? and is old 'Scottie' alive still ? I wonder what bag uncle will make on the 12th this year. I wish—no, I do not wish, at least I do not *intend* to wish to be with him.

"Yours, &c., &c.,

"P. A. A."

"A woman's letter !" exclaimed Gaie, indignantly. "I wonder what woman's letter he has ever seen except mine and his old Aunt Ashton's. You would not write to him since he grew up, Donna. What can he have seen ?"

"I told you yours was flippant and ungrammatical, Gaie," said Donna, smiling.

Then she looked across at her father, whose bacon and toast were still growing cold. With a dry exclamation, as Gaie concluded, he returned to his own letter again.

He finished it slowly, then handed it down to Donna, and with a smile of much perplexity and vexation, and a shake of his head, he turned to the energetic stirring of his cup of tea. While she perused it, the expression of concern in his countenance reflected *elf* quickly on hers.

"That is not altogether a satisfactory young man," said Sir John, emphatically, as she looked up at him, when she had finished, with astonishment and consternation in her face.

"What can he mean, papa?"

"He means, my dear, that his judgment has gone crooked for the time being, and that he has set himself to go through the fiery education of experience, and that no one shall hold him back. That is, most distinctly, what he means."

"But where is he going? What is he going to do? To what society has he joined himself? What does it all mean?"

"My dear, his heart is in the right place; but he has got his head full of maggots, as we say up here."

"But the Cause, papa—what does he mean?"

"I have a very strong suspicion what he means," said Sir John, holding out his hand for the letter again. "I am not quite so ignorant of his sublime Society as he imagines. And I see good reason to conclude that he intends entering the Universal League, a set of visionaries, relics, as far as I can see, of an almost obsolete school of thought. Of their extent and designs I have no knowledge; but that, I have no doubt in my own mind, is the body of people he has joined."

And Sir John pushed his plate back, lowered his spectacles, and returned to Piers's letter again.

"The boy is not half a bad fellow," he went on, "but he has got into some bad hands. He is an obstinate fellow, with a huge respect for his own judgment and a mistaken idea that that judgment is unassailable. He thinks himself cool, dispassionate, and unalterable in his views; he is, in reality, impressionable and enthusiastic. He must go his own way: he must commit his own blunders, poor boy, and bear his own stripes. But I have a confidence in his pulling through: he has a good heart, Donna—a good heart, has he not?"

"I think he has," answered Donna; and she turned

her face away ; old Dart, the greyhound, for whom Piers had inquired, claiming her attention with convenient persistency just then. She bent over him. "Quiet, Dart, good dog ! Papa," she continued, "do you think he has quite gone away, for years ? Will he not come back ?"

"It is impossible to say. He can draw as he likes on his own banker's account now ; I have no control over him. But I will tell you what we can do. I will write to my old friend, Count Arlé De Hauton, and tell him to find out the lad in Paris, and let us know a little of his goings on. Your Aunt Kellam knows the De Hautons, and often stays with them over there ; and—that reminds me—here is a letter from her, this morning."

He opened it, and Donna bent again to pat the greyhound with an absent and saddened expression on her face.

Gaie continued her breakfast philosophically, and on her piquant countenance sat indignation and disapproval of no ordinary degree. She could by no means forgive Piers's desertion at this bright autumn time. No arm could rival his for strength and endurance on the river or on the loch, in calm or in storm. She was most indignant.

"My dears," said Sir John presently, "here is your aunt wants both of you, or at all events one, to go down to her, to be taken through a round of autumn visits. What do you say ? Donna, it must be you."

"No, no ; please, papa, no. I could not leave you : you have only just come down."

"Then, Gaie, you must expand your rose-leaves and be a full-blown flower for a month or two, while Fräulein takes her holidays. Eh, my sunbeam ?"

"I, papa !" exclaimed Gaie with indignation : "I leave you and Donna, and the dogs and Maisie, just when the heather is out, and Maisie's foot is well and *she* can trot again, and Frisk has just had those lovely *puppies* ! Why, papa, I should be worse than Piers.

No ; my compliments to Aunt Kellam, please, and—*merci bien !* ”

“ What ! neither of you will go ? ” said their father, with an amused and delighted twinkle in his eyes. “ What am I to say to your aunt ? ”

“ *Merci bien,* ” repeated Gaie, with a demure little bow.

“ What ! that my two little girls prefer their own hills and their old father and this wild life, as she calls it, up here, to all the smart houses she speaks of, and all the gay doings she describes. Ah, well, the old story ! ” he continued, with an expression of pretended despair. “ Young people will have their own way in these days, and I find I have not a morsel of authority with mine. This is what I shall have to write back ! ”

“ Write what you like ; only we will not go ! ” repeated Gaie, with determined emphasis.

“ Well, well, ” he answered. “ But look here, that is not all the letter. ”

“ MY DEAR JOHN, ” he read out in an amused tone, “ *are* you giving, or *have* you given, *any* proper consideration to the *great* injustice you are doing Donna, my poor sister’s child, in keeping her mewed up in your northern wilds, instead of having her properly introduced in town ? Donna must be eighteen, and she is not yet presented. I *urge* upon you the *sacred* duty while there is yet time. Take a house in London, be prepared for next season, and let her be then presented at the first drawing-room, and brought out in a manner befitting her position. Her future, &c., &c., ” said Sir John, folding up the letter ; for he had views of his own, and he did not choose to read aloud to his children *these* views on their future, with all the important matrimonial projects the word “ future, ” to Aunt Kellum, implied.

“ So, Donna ; you see what is in store for you. ”

Donna looked at him again, the gravity and the wistful sadness round her lips quarrelling with the

bright answering smile she tried to return to him from her brown eyes.

"Please, papa, not till Gaie comes too."

"Ah! ha! is that it?—two cherries on one stalk, two roses on one stem. I am to tell Aunt Kellam, she cannot have one of my birds until she unlocks the school-cage upstairs, and lets out the other. You are imprisoned until you are seventeen, did she not say, Gaie?"

"Yes, papa, alack-a-day!" responded Gaie disconsolately.

"And now you are——?"

"Fifteen," she answered again—"only fifteen: two whole years more. Oh, if Donna could only put her head on to my shoulders for that time, and let mine get on to hers, she would not mind lessons a bit! She never did."

"I minded other things, though, Gaie."

"Yes; you did not get Frau-frau so early into subjection as I did," she went on. "Oh, poor old Frau, she really is not bad to live with, now that she knows we *will* be obeyed."

"Heyday! monkey; you obeyed, indeed!" said her father with a laugh. "But, Donna, two years, will it do, my darling? Do you really not wish to be 'introduced,' to quote Aunt Kellam, before then?"

"I do not think I do, papa. I should not like to go out, and have to leave Gaie at home."

"But the balls, operas, soirées, my dear, and all the rest of it; do you not wish for some of these?"

"I do not think I want anything, papa," she answered, looking away from him again. She bent over her dog. It was a splendid old greyhound that Piers had brought from Pollingworth in one of his visits, and had left with her when he went away again. She stooped to caress his rough head, and to hide the expression of sadness and disappointment she felt gathering on her face.

"Well, my dear, you must please yourself," said

Sir John. "And," he continued with a proud and pleased smile, "I must write to Aunt Kellam and tell her that, if my bonnie Madonna is superior in her tastes to the sort of young ladies she is accustomed to, it is not her fault nor mine. And now I must go and write to De Hauton about that wrong-headed boy."

Sir John gathered up his letters, and went off to his writing room.

"It is all very extraordinary," said Gaie solemnly. "I cannot understand anything of all this about Piers; can you, Donna?"

"No, I cannot," she said with a sigh. "I understand nothing but that he is going away. If I could understand it, I should not mind."

"Not mind his not coming down? Oh, Donna, I should! Why, we had such fun in spring, and we were going to do all kinds of things now in the autumn. Oh, I do not care how much he takes up with 'Causes' at college-time, if he only goes on coming down here for his holidays. But can you make it out about the 'Cause,' Donna?"

"No," she answered sadly, speaking more to herself than to Gaie; "that is it." And she raised her head, and clasped her hands together on the desk before her, and looked thoughtfully from the window. "It is all so vague and incoherent. Papa seems to know a little of the Society, but evidently he does not think well of what he does know. Ah! I fear—I fear it is some wild vision that has seized him, and he will rush off with vehemence, and perhaps spend all his life and his power in pursuing some *ignis fatuus* to a useless end."

"And all the time he will not come here?" said Gaie, indignantly.

"No, Gaie, he will not come here," Donna answered; and then her voice faltered, the firm clear-cut eyelids trembled and drooped over her eyes, then a tear came and dropped on the table before her. Her lip shook, and she clasped her fingers tightly in the

strong effort to control herself, but in vain. A heaving sob came, and then another and another, and she leaned back her head with weary gesture against Gaie's shoulders and burst into uncontrollable tears.

"Donna!" exclaimed Gaie astonished, "are you so sorry, too?"

"Oh, Gaie," she said, "it might have been such a grand life—it ought to be. He is so good, as papa says, and his aims are so high, and his powers so strong and willing; and now, if he is throwing it all away, and if he makes a failure of his whole life by giving himself up to some fearful mistake, some false, false vision that has captivated his eyes! Oh, Gaie, it is so sad! and his life might have been so grand, so true!"

"Yes, he is so grave over everything: I often used to think he must be a hero some way or other, and would do differently with his life from other people. And now, perhaps he is going to do it; perhaps it is all right, Donna."

"No, no," she exclaimed, "it cannot be; it must be all wrong, vague, unpractical, and incoherent. Oh, Gaie, it is so sad!" She raised her head now—the little outburst had relieved her—and brushed away her tears.

"And then he will not come here all this autumn," sighed Gaie disconsolately again; "and we did so surely think he would come, did we not, Donna?"

"Yes, we did," said her sister. "But it is no good, Gaie. Go, dear: do not let us talk about him; it is no good. I must begin my work."

She drew her writing-book towards her with an energetic effort at self-control.

"Very well," said Gaie, "then I'll go away. I am going to the garden, Donna; do come soon;" and Gaie disappeared. "What a funny girl Donna is!" she soliloquized as she went down the passage. "You never can make out if she is sorry for anything for ever so long; then, all of a sudden, out it comes, and you find she has been sorrier than any one else after all."

really *do* think she wishes Piers had come down so.”

Ah ! that autumn had little brightness for Donna ; or indeed her heart was many a day sore, sad, and weary with the vain, vain wishing of—just that very wish.



CHAPTER XVI.

“PANEM ET CIRCENSES.”

PARIS ! with the silver crest of an early autumn noon rising over the Champs Elysées, pale and faint in its lustre, because the rich glow of the departed sunset is still lingering with warm color over the scene, till flashing upon the windows of the palaces, still glistening on the roofs and churches, on the water in the fountains, on the trees that sweep their rich foliage now over the dusty roads.

The day's labor is over, the feverish brains and busy hands are free, and above all it has just been linner-time, and Paris gasps for breath for one transient hour ; the lines of work are brushed from the weary foreheads and men prepare for pleasure.

From the dawn of to-day to the break of to-morrow, this is the one hour when these brains cease their whirling, and hearts their feverish throb. Since that sun rose, what labor and weariness, what sweat of the brow, what struggles of the brain, have been lived through, beneath its hot lustrous rays, as it shone on the vast city, with its crowd of eager humanity pursuing gain !

Ere it rise again—ah ! that other pursuit, yet more feverish, more wasting, more delirious, in which more human lives are hewn down, and more fall and perish by the way,—the pursuit of pleasure.

"*Panem et circenses*"—bread and amusement, the old formula of a tottering Rome—is there nothing else worthy the powers of men?

Bread is a first necessity, and would that pleasure, refined and healthful, might mingle in every lot. Hungry multitudes crowd our cities—would we could give them bread! and melancholy multitudes of warped, distressed, and joyless humanity meet our saddened gaze on every side—beings with tastes and capabilities for happiness doomed to lives wretched, unbeauteous, and sad—would that all had the means in their hands to win the bread of support for this life; would that all had a healthful share of its joy!

Yet Paris, sweet Paris! gay and sun-lit, radiant with that wonderful evanescence of joyful vitality, that sparkling element of your own existence in which you gayly welcome all comers to participate—city of pleasure for the rich and for the poor—city to which busy careworn men of soberer and more murky climes look back tenderly in gratitude for the fresh draughts of joyous life drunk in its sunshine. Beautiful Paris!

These are the last years of the second Empire, brilliant, triumphant years; with only sinister shadows creeping over the gorgeous horizon, with only muffled voices uttering ominous and unintelligible sounds. Apparently an acme has been attained of prosperity and universal enjoyment; contradictory and unpleasant sights are hidden carefully away.

Piers and Victor have arrived in Paris to-day. They lean side by side now on the balcony at an open window in a restaurant of the Champs Elysées; they are looking out upon the characteristic scene—a scene soothing and suggestive, inspiring soft evening dreams in the beauty of that evening light. Soothing by that sense of stillness resting on the spirit after the noisy day; suggestive because it *was* Paris, and a distant ceaseless murmur came from the living breathing crowd of humanity that was just there, beyond that

green fringe of the Champs Elysées and across the waters of the moon-lit Seine.

As they leant side by side on the little wooden balcony, Piers was as usual very silent, and Victor's voice murmured soft and unceasing. He was thinking aloud, talking half to himself and only half to his friend.

"How I love Paris!" he said. "I love the shadowy beauty, creeping with the soft nightfall over the drooping foliage there, over the white palaces of the Champs Elysées—over the grand triumphal arch. I love the soft night wind, the tender trill of the nightingales, the rich intoxicating scent of the sleeping flowers—it is wafted up to us from the garden below—how rich their hues are! look at the scarlet, golden purple, and gentian blue. How slowly our cigar-smoke curls with a soft feathery vapor away over the scent-laden air! How sweetly the echoes reach us of those voices in the Champs; they are voices of happy children, entranced with the familiar objects of the Elysian fields down there. Listen! How soothing is that distant refrain of music! They are beginning the Musard concert, in the space beyond that chestnut grove. There is always music in the air in Paris—sweet, bright, and joyous like her sunshine and herself. Life is set to music eternally here; the heart sings in answer, and is irresistibly glad. I love bright Paris—the passionate heart of France. And I love France above all. Yes, study, travel, enlarge my view of human nature as I may, Piers, adopt the grand creed of universal human union as strongly as my mind can seize its designs, still it is only when I come back here, or when I think of it when far away, that I recognize again and again, as it rushes over me, as it overwhelms my heart and fills my eyes with tears, I recognize the strongest feeling of my life, the utter devotion with which I love this land of my fathers, and the strength of energy with which I could pour out my blood for its honor or its good. Listen, look, feel—is it not *delicious to live?*"

Piers had been more than usually silent during these reveries of Victor ; for, indeed, his mind was weighted with a sense of new thoughts, new sensations, hitherto unconceived in his philosophies, that seemed to rush over him, and thrill his heart with hilarious life—he could not understand it ; it did not even occur to him to try ; he enjoyed simply ; he leaned from the window, and gazed, and listened, and felt. He did not know what he felt, but it was something that made him a new man.

These two had arrived in Paris that day. They had wandered through the Tuileries Gardens, across the Place de la Concorde, along the Avenue de l'Etoile ; and then they had dined together in the Champs Elysées, at one of those gaudy little cafés that nestle under the shadows of the broad chestnut trees.

They had watched the warm sunshine flooding the gay, many-colored scene ; they had lingered while it set in gold and amber over the city, while the last rays faded from the softly tinted horizon, and the silver crescent rose in the blue depths of the darkening sky ; and they lingered still, listening, gazing, talking in low tones,—Piers, as usual, simply responsive, content to listen, and to feel,—Victor's speech flowing with quick expression of those sentiments, philosophic and reflective, as well as poetic and heart-felt, that sprang up eager and spontaneous, as he yielded to the associations of his boyhood's home.

"The murky skies of Cambridge never gave us a sunset like this, Piers. Much as I love the brains of England, I am certainly true to the skies of France. How light it is, too !—it will not be really dark all night. What o'clock is it ?—eight ? It is time we were going to the Place St. Etienne."

"Do they expect *me*, do you think ?" said Piers, shyly.

"Oh, yes, they do. I sent a note, directly we arrived at the hotel, to Faustine, and they will be *longing* to see us. I told them we would dine at my

old friend Duleau's here, and that we should stroll down afterwards.”

They were silent a moment.

“What is it, Vic.,” said Piers, suddenly, with an impulse of manner unusual to him—“What is it? The influence of the air?—the place? I do not know what it is, but I feel as I have never felt before. I seem to realize that I have chosen a new life—a new country almost, for the time being,—and to have at last left all my old self behind—my old Pollingworth self, I mean, that hated everything. It has been really living to me, at last, to see my way to a Cause I can serve; and I seem to-night first to realize it.”

“You have become a son of the Universal,” said Victor lightly; “and the Universal is a child of Paris. You are enrolled among hers, and the bewitching mother is greeting your approach to her with the winning tenderness, the mysterious fascination, with which her children always feel she claims their hearts.”

He was looking round smilingly into his friend's dark face, flushed as it was with unusual excitement and life.

“Piers, you will make a hero for us some day,” he said.

“If I ever do, Vic., you and Frederick and—well, perhaps one other will have made me so.”

“My dear boy, no man can do that for his brother. Heroes are born, not made by influence. But you have something of one often in that stern, dark face of yours.”

“I feel sometimes that I would do anything,” said Piers, “if I could only see what is the best thing to do. I feel that if I could grasp once and for ever the realization of a definite goal, that it is in me to count sacrifice and a life-long devotion as nothing in the scales against success.”

“The goal seems clear before us now,” said Victor. “In my own ideal of it, the clouds are clearing away wonderfully.”

"Yes ; you have helped me much, Vic. At last too, see things that are to be done."

"If," said Victor, with grave emphasis, "the men *do* them are yet born upon the earth. Or perhaps who knows?—we may have only reached the generation when man can conceive such things."

"All great actions must begin with the idea them," said Piers.

"Yes, and the idea is here ; the achievement is come. But that is a depressing thought ; we must not admit it. We are young : action, achievement, success, may be ours. Things grow quickly in these times. The blossom is now already, and the harvest may crown our old age. But halt !—we shall have enough of metaphysical, philosophic, and political controversy before we have finished this evening. Come, let us go to Dax's now."



CHAPTER XVII.

QUEEN OF THE CAUSE.

IN a quiet little square, at the end of the Boulevard d'Auribeau, the waters of a clear fountain were thringing up their sparkling rays, and falling with a s rippling cadence into their stone basin. A group of small chestnut, lilac, and laburnum trees clustered round the fountain, and edged the old jagged pavement with a fringe of verdant shade. The sun had been beating here all the hot afternoon, and had gered with its gold and amber tints over the trees, fountain and the gabled house, all those sweet hours while evening was sinking into night.

One arched doorway seemed still to glisten in *tender light*, and one window just above the door

shone with a wealth of snowy jasmine and scarlet passion-flower which even the departed sunlight did not seem to throw into shade.

The framework of that window, and the living picture it framed, were instinct with such an enchanting beauty of color and contrast, that the little Place appeared bright with their radiance, even now, when the sun was nearly gone. The *jalousies* had been closed all day, during the scorching heat ; but now they were flung open, and—Faustine stood there breathing the cool air of the evening, with the last lingering rays falling on her beautiful bending head.

For Faustine was very beautiful. There was that in her beauty that induced comparison—an intense and indescribable poetry, a richness of color that suggested similitudes it was difficult to define. You never thought of a lily in looking at her—of that loveliness pale, dignified, and delicate; or of the rose with its blushing hues, all soft and gay, all sun-lit and smiling; or of any flower, except the crimson passion-flower, such as clustered round her now in the window; and of one particular leaf—which is it?—dark and lustrous, soft as velvet when you touch its veined surface to your cheek, and fringed with an edge of thorns. It grows in wild abundance, clinging round the red rocks that hang, jagged and precipitous, high over the Mediterranean waves. It is a beautiful leaf, darker than the olive, richer than the bay, jagged and shaped curiously like the pointed ivy. Faustine's head looked as if destined by nature to be always crowned—and with *such* a wreath, beautiful and luxuriant—perhaps edged with thorns.

Do you remember the child of the workshop in Le Grand St. Marteau, draining the cognac glass of Bordeaux to the hopes of a Republic, with a flush of enthusiasm that roused echoes of stormy applause?

We have not followed her through the growth of that young tempestuous nature—through the latter years which her restless eagerness for new experiences,

new fields for enterprise and observation, led her to spend in a self-appointed mission to convert the young English mind, spent in the schoolrooms of juvenile high-born Britons, to whom she was at once a goddess and a tyrant, viewed at once with abject terror and admiring love. Unsuspecting parents, buried in the interests of the London world, knew little and thought less of that life within their schoolrooms, and of the strange dramatic scenes often enacted there. "Faustine inspired," as her pupils described her, sounded notes of inspiration that may echo strongly—still.

But that life soon wearied her. Those childish minds reflected nothing of the excitement and pathos of her own. Back she came, after sundry wanderings—after some curious glimpses of life—back to their new pretty home in the Place St. Etienne, to the old dreamy man who loved her there, and to her circle of rough, fiery-tongued adorers, to whom she, with her imperious mind and her glorious beauty, was at once sovereign and goddess—their conscience and their law.

The Universal, that once pure and beautiful dream, that vision, all fair unsullied, of old Auber's brain, had spread widely now—had flowed far away from him; flowing, filtering, permeating through many lands. It had mingled with many currents; it had many a dark element staining its once fair aspect; it had many a vein of poisonous evil coursing through its mighty frame.

The Universal belonged to many nations now; it had masters, leaders, teachers of every tongue and creed; but here, in the Place St. Etienne, where people still clustered nightly, and talked their mingled jargon round the board of Auber Dax, the Universal meant—Faustine,—its prophetess and its queen! Republican, atheist, revolutionary as many who crowded round her were, there was not one among them all who could push his anarchy to the point of revolution against the sovereignty of her beauty, or his cynical contempt to the disobedience to her glance or word. *Republicans, they owned her their queen; infidels, they*

orshipped her with the silent reverence with which men adore their God,—Faustine, “the Damask Rose,” some called her, of the Faubourg St. Etienne.

They called her so, though there *was* nothing of a soft blushing rose of Turkey about her: the passion-flower, and that thorn-edged creeper, the rich crimson shadowed by the dark lustre of the velvet leaf—that was her similitude.

But while human nature remains what it is, and instinctive human poetry speaks through us in simple, conscious comparisons suggested by our daily life, men will go on, unvaryingly, likening the woman of our hearts’ love to some kind of rose—the flower they prize best, a beautiful, sweet, blooming, youth-like thing. But still Faustine was different.

She was known all over Paris; she was known and loved. The world knew her; and people watched her tall, straight form passing down the Avenue de l’Océan with the old man leaning on her vigorous arm, and a dark-eyed dreamy-looking man nearly as tall at her other side. People watched to look, if only for a moment, on the beauty of her Jewish face to see those eyes, dark and liquid, flash their wondrous light with proud, indifferent glances, as she passed on; and people whispered strangely of her, when she had gone a little way:

“Old Dax’s granddaughter; and Dax was an eerie old man. Poor Henri Tolberg was bewitched with those black eyes: there he was, with that sad, weary look of his, hanging after her as usual, and she neither heeding nor heeding the poor fellow or his faithful love.”

It was said of her, among her own surroundings, that those eyes could never soften to any real sweetness of a responsive love—that her cheek had never taken a deeper shade, her eyelids never drooped under any human gaze. Men loved Faustine; many and very different men loved her, with an eager sincerity of passion it was impossible to conceal. But Faustine had loved no one, so it was said. Brightly flashed her

eye, proud was the carriage of her beautiful head, warm and passionate was the rich coloring that rushed ever changeful over her olive cheek ; but none could boast that it deepened at their words, or that the glance had softened as it returned their gaze.

Proud, strong, indomitable young creature she appeared to them, as they looked on her beauty, as she moved among them, as they bowed and bent before her to obey.

There is no one to watch her now, however ; and—as that lingering after-glow falls upon her dark braided hair—she is bending it low and earnestly, as it is never *seen* to bend. The rich face is quivering with strong feeling, the color is deepening on her cheek, the eyes, that are wont to glisten so hardly, are softly shadowed by the long lashes, and are dewy with something strangely like—a woman's tear.

There is a large basket of flowers on the sill before her ; for Faustine, with the poetic taste of her southern nature, loves to have in the summer-time flowers everywhere—a lavish, boundless luxury of sweet-scented, bright-colored flowers. And she always has them, for many are daily eager to minister to this, her one feminine taste. Flowers come to her in glorious profusion—rich-scented exotics, beautiful pyramids of roses, such as only fair France can at all times supply. Often baskets of wild flowers, the simple offering of distant rural friends ; and with all these she decked her rooms and Auber's, till they were bright with a beauty that seemed a fit setting for herself.

It was *one* of the strange contradictory bits of intense sweetness in her fiery nature, this passionate, almost childish, love of flowers. The other was :

The basket before her to-night came from the country. The blue-bells and wild honey-suckles, sweet-scented violets and the pale brier-rose, had been plucked from banks edging some cool rippling stream far away in the forests, from hedges where the brier and boxwood, the alder and the white clematis, mingle

wildly with the thorn. They have come to her this evening, into hot sultry Paris, borne by a bloused and saboted peasant, an emissary from the distant *terrain* of a faithful friend. They have come to her with the scent on them, all fresh and dewy, of the green country far away; and among them nestled (perhaps from accident) a little rose-hearted, white-fringed, common marguerite—a daisy from the village green, a little simple thing, stolen in somehow with this rich offering to the proud Faustine.

And she had seized it, and over it bends that stately head! the dark eyes are dewy, and as she holds it, the firm hand trembles. A bitter smile, contradicting the yearning sweetness of her eyes, curves her lips, as half ashamed, half reluctant, she plucks one snowy and delicate spike from the crimson centre, and still ashamed, still reluctant, she pauses.

Faustine! the proud, reckless, heartless Faustine, what does she do, pulling the tender leaflets from the snow disk? What! just the old, old tale, chanting the old words low to herself, with eyes soft as Gretchen's, with lip quivering as hers quivered, with a sigh as gentle and as laden with wistful love. She plucked the white leaves:

“Peut-etre, il m'aime un peu,
Il m'aime un peu—beaucoup.
Ah! celui que j'aime, il m'aime un peu—
Passionément—non, pas de tout.”

She flung the flower down and broke into a hard laugh; she threw her head up and strove to throw off the soft influence that enthralled her. But it bent again: a moment her face was hidden in the clasp of two trembling hands; she swayed herself to and fro in the quick struggle for self-victory; a sigh, almost a sob, shook her frame, then—it was over. She looked up again with nothing in her eyes but the *piquant diablerie* that commonly characterized them. She leaned out of the window on her brown shapely arms,

and looked across the Place with a reckless and full gaze.

Just then two figures entered, coming su round the corner, beyond the fountain and the ing trees ; she could see them—in a moment the below the window.

The summer twilight still lingered in the Pla it fell on them as they stood below her—on t dark figure unknown to her, on the fair hair : the sunny face of the other she knew so well. fell on her too, lighting up her beauty as she there, her flower-basket on the sill before her, the window-frame wreathing her dark face.

They came near ; they stood below her paused ; and Faustine, seized with a sudden ir stood upright, plunged her arms deep into the basket, caught up a sweet burden of the violets, suckles, and wild roses, and showered them upo heads.

A gay laugh from Victor, as he caught the flowers, detected the assailant, and flung then again ; and profound, silent astonishment from who stood with the violets and sweet wild clinging to his hair and shoulders, looking up window, at the green framework, and the rich picture there.

" Ah ! " shouted Victor, "*Faustine ! La belle tine, toujours, méchante ! Je te salue, Faustine.*

He picked up flower after flower, and flung up to her again.

" This was France," Piers felt, with some ity ; " and *this* was the accepted conduct of this clime ! "

" Come along upstairs," cried Victor. " I let us stand to be pelted here. The rose-leave fallen, *belle Faustine* ; we only feel the thorns ; he pushed the door open and entered the little hall.

" Come up," he repeated ; and he preceded

mounting the stairs, and without hesitation entered Faustine's room.

She turned from the window as he came in. Both were grave now, and the color had faded from her cheek. It was two years since she had seen him. She came forward and held out both hands, and he took them in his with gentle courtesy, and pressed a kiss upon each.

"Faustine, we meet with *pleasure* again."

He looked down into her face, his eyes full of warm affection, his smile gentle and sweet; and she looked up at him, those great eyes of hers, soft with strong wistful tenderness,—trying to speak her friendship—striving to conceal her love! They questioned his face with an eager gaze. *How* glad was he to see her again? Only just so glad! "We meet with pleasure," he said; and she—pleasure! Could the pain at her heart be called pleasure?—the mingled joy and pain with which she looked into his face once more be called by such a name? Pleasure! he met her with pleasure, his boyhood's friend—Faustine, but, but,—strange as it seemed—spite all her beauty, spite all the power with which she held dominion over other men, *he* had never bent his heart before her, he had never called her "queen," and she—only cared for him!

Still holding her hand in both his, he turned to Piers.

"This is my friend," he said. "You must give him an English welcome. He is one of 'ours,' Faustine."

She drew her hands from Victor, and turned to Piers. She looked straight into his face, her eyes full of dauntless inquiry. She was accustomed to all classes of men. She read him for a moment with scrutiny; then she obeyed Victor, and held out her hand. Piers took it, and stood a moment, returning her gaze, with the flush deepening on his cheek, and his eyes, dark as her own, meeting hers with an expression half wonder, half-unconscious admiration, as she stood be-

fore him, scanning his face. He did not take in anything of her character, as she did of his.

It could only have lasted a second, that silent greeting, but it always seemed to Piers to have been a long time. He said nothing—nothing occurred to him to say; but Victor, who had looked on, amused and laughing, exclaimed at last,—

“Well, Faustine, have you made up your mind about him? Will he do?”

“One of ‘ours’?” she answered; “one of yours or mine?”

She drew her hand from Piers, but looked still inquiringly up into his face.

“One of *the Cause*,” he answered with a smile, a deeper hue than ever on his cheek, and a sensation somewhere, that the Cause was indeed a very pleasant one, if—this was its Queen!

“Yours or mine, *petite méchante!*” said Victor. “Where do we divide? I believe you are the chief element in the war the house threatens to wage against itself, Faustine!”

She looked at him for a moment with bitter scorn.

“I expect to see *you* soon,” she said, “with a ‘*de*’ before your name again, or perhaps a vicomte of the Empire! I do not believe you know your own colors when you see them, Victor.”

“I know ‘red’ when I see it, and I hate it with truth,” he answered. “But, bah! Faustine, a truce to politics! give my friend a kindlier greeting than an instant attack on his views and mine. I tell you, he is of ours.”

“What,” she said, with soft sarcasm, turning to Piers again—“what can an English aristocrat, a *milord de la grand Bretagne*, with his great position and his gold, do in the cause of the poor French artisan? Why does he take part in the interests of the children of toil?”

“I am not a *milord*, in the first place,” said Piers.

"My position is just what I quarrel with. My fortune, such as it is, I lay at the feet of the Cause."

"As Victor has taught it you," she said, turning away with disdain. "Sit down, will you not, both of you. I must tell my grandfather that you have come."

"Stay; tell me first, Faustine," said Victor, stopping her, "a little about him. How is he? and how do affairs go, as they regard him?"

"*Pauvre cher vielillard!*" she answered, "he is weak enough; and he sighs because the world goes too fast for him, and people are not satisfied to stay by the notions he taught them years ago. His disciples are many, Victor—growing daily more; but they outstrip their master by many a strong, hopeful stride."

"Hopeful? Ah!" said Victor, shaking his head.

"Listen, dear friend," she answered, turning suddenly on him again with sparkling eyes. "He dreamt—the peaceful old man—he dreamt, as we all sometimes dream, of heaven, and thought it was descending upon earth; and now he is vexed, because men have found that there is no heaven, or at all events, it is not coming here, but that by his help, by making earth-like reality of his Utopian dream, they can assist themselves towards doing away with a good deal that makes this earth an unpleasant place for a great many of them. Ah! is not that about the upshot of it all?"

"And the old man begins to feel himself not a master, but a tool."

"He is growing old," she said softly. "Others are springing up, vigorous and young, and they will work out his thoughts, not in his way, but in just their own. Your coming will do him good, Victor," she went on, turning her eyes to him with a gentler light in them. "You and Henri are always at one with him."

"I have been too long away," was his reply. "Tell him I am here, Faustine."

"Yes, I will bring him in;" and she rose.

She paused a moment before Piers, who had risen when she did, and she looked up into his face again.

"I cannot understand," she said, still in her softened voice, "what brings you here. Was it not pleasant in that England of yours, with riches, with youth? Was there not enough of sweetness in the air, of brightness in your life, to banish care—enough to stifle the sounds of suffering in your ears—enough to blind your eyes to want and woe? What brought you here?"

He looked straight into her face as she stood before him, her fingers twined together, her head thrown back, as she questioned him with the imperious directness with which she never scrupled to penetrate the reserve of a history or a man; and he answered spontaneously, speaking just the answer his heart gave, expressing it as it came irrepressibly, suddenly, to his lips; he said, "Fate!"

She shrugged her shoulders slightly, and her lip curved as she turned from him and went from the room. She had read him again; she knew it was another, only just another heart, among many hearts, flung at her feet in that word—yielded as his gaze answered hers, to her dominion and her power.

So many; and now this other, wearying her, bringing no glow of triumph, no thrill of answering joy; for *her* heart was bitter, her tongue was barbed and dangerous, her soul was dark, because there was no such language in the only eyes that had sweetness in their gaze for her, no such submission in the only voice she loved. Bright and debonnair *he* was, full of kindly feeling for her, and yet utterly beyond her power.

He would not feel on any point as she would have him feel; he would not embrace principles, as others embraced them, at her inspiration and at her word; he would not hate as she hated; he could not love as *she* loved.

How she loved! How the eyes drooped that had flashed so angrily, as she stood now without the door, and paused a moment to realize that she had seen him *again*. How low and tender was the rich voice, break-

ing in a quivering moan from her, as she struggled with herself. He had come back just the same, ready to spar with playful brightness, ready to contend with her as warmly as ever, his high-strung idealistic doctrines measuring themselves against hers, that were so passionate, so resentful, and so heedless of results.

The two sat, when she had left them, in the little *salon*, Victor glancing laughingly around, recognizing familiar objects, and detecting new ones.

It was a pretty room, radiant with flowers, vases of creamy roses decorating every table, and filling the window-stands. It had been furnished for Faustine by her grandfather, when she announced her proposed return to him, and was decorated with the old Frenchman's notions of youthful taste. It was panelled with soft color, gilded like a bonbon-box, and surrounded with pretty ormolu chandeliers pendant from the wall. A fanciful little bower, for his dark-eyed queen, old Auber had prepared as she came back to him—a very different apartment from the old workshop at Le Grand St. Marteau in the Rue St. Clive.

But Dax's position was different. Those delicate, intricate discoveries of his had raised him to a pinnacle among watchmakers, to a post of power, wealth, and authority in the Parisian *fabriques*. He had made much money during the last fifteen years, as well as dreamt many dreams; and his own surroundings and Faustine's were much altered accordingly.

He still had his workroom and table of curious tools, over which he pored continually; but his "*Fabrique*," where the tiny, beautiful watches, that went far and near for exhibition, were made, was a large concern, and occupied many ingenious hands.

Dax and Faustine received, as of old, every evening; but their receptions contrasted curiously, in everything but political principles, with those of Le Grand St. Marteau, fifteen years ago.

"Is she not a red-hot little revolutionist?" said Victor, while Faustine was still away.

"She is very—she has very—her eyes are very black," was what Piers finally made up his mind to say.

"Yes—two fires of *l'Inferno*, I tell her, when she works herself up; but they are very fine ones, there's no denying. Oh, she is considered a regular beauty, is Faustine."

"Yes, she is—beautiful!" said Piers emphatically.

"Yes, I suppose there is no doubt about it, taking her eyes and face and hair altogether; there is not a fault to be found with her; and there is something poetical in the grand heroic style about her, too. But she is not my taste in beauty, either. I should not like all women to suggest volcanic fires."

"She is splendid, I think!" said Piers. "I do not quite take her in, though: I cannot make out what she is driving at exactly."

"Worrying me, you will find pretty generally, is the object of her little remarks," said Victor. "Faustine and I have kept up a sparring match this many a year on all matters of principle, political and otherwise. And when I am here, whatever is going on, you will see, if you just watch—to-night, for instance, when all the fellows come (for I have no doubt there will be the usual crew)—whatever she says, all her little barbed arrows will be let fly straight at me. Still we are capital friends; we have never had a single quarrel, and I have known her all her life. But somehow about three years ago we got into a chronic state of spar, and so we go on at it. Ah, here she comes!"

And he rose as Faustine, with old Dax leaning on her arm, entered through the curtain hanging over the little door.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WILD WEEDS.

PIERS rose also, and stood bending his head before the frail, white-haired man, with a deeper sense of reverence than he had ever before experienced. The aged Founder of their Cause—the creator of that ideal they had offered their lives to pursue—he stood silent and aside, as Victor touched the worn hand with his lips, and looked with infinite tenderness into the gentle dreamy face, so old and so lined now with thought and care.

"*Mon père, mon père !*" he murmured.

"My son," said the old man, "my dear son!"

And he put one thin hand (the other still leaning on Faustine's arm) on Victor's shoulder, and gazed into the younger man's face for a long moment, his deep-sunk eyes full of eagerness, full of affection and pride.

"*Fils de mon esprit,*" he said again; and then Victor drew the hand within his arm.

"Let me, Faustine, let me lead him to his chair. Sit down, my father, be seated, and let me present to you my friend; a friend good and true to me as a brother, and a friend who will be leal to the Cause in its highest form."

"Ah!" said Dax, and he bowed with courtesy to Piers, who came forward, his face colored with deep feeling.

The three were a curious picture, touching by the keen intensity of their own feeling. Feeling spoken all undisguised with the eagerness of their impulsive nation, in their mobile faces and expressive eyes.

"My best friend," said Victor again.

And Piers, bending with grave reverence towards the old man, obeyed his English impulse, and held out his hand.

"Very glad, monsieur," said Auber, "to make your acquaintance. *Ce cher* Victor has often written to us of you."

"I am honored by yours," was Piers's answer. "I owe to you, monsieur," he continued, expressing himself slowly in his difficult French—"I owe to you the deepest and brightest thoughts that have ever entered my life."

"Ah! it is fair to see the fruits returning in the glow of young faces, brave and strong, like yours, monsieur—the fruits of the seed cast on many waters, years ago."

"I hope the fruit will soon be ripened over the lands," said Piers. "It is springing up everywhere."

"Everywhere!" exclaimed the old man. "Wonderful to see it in the space of one short life. It is true; and, my children, be not discouraged; do not fear, though the first crop of our harvest does come up evil somewhat, because of the wild soil on which it falls. We can but cast good seed; generations by-gone have to answer for the badness of the fermenting soil."

"Ah! it is so, indeed, *mon père*," said Victor. "Wild weeds will come even from your good sowing; but let them grow; Time will show the eternity of truth, the mortality of falsehood; Time will separate the evil from the good. The fallacies they work out of your words will fall and perish; the truth you speak can never die."

"Ah, Victor, could they all know, as you know, the evil from the good! But listen here, boy: since that sad St. Pélagie affair, dark things are rising among us, and all my doctrine cannot preach it down. You will hear to-night; you will hear to-night."

At that moment the little house-bell tinkled loudly, and Faustine rose.

"Ah! here come some of the '*confrères*,'" said Dax, as she passed behind the curtained archway. "*Whom shall we have to-night?*"

He was answered by the opening door and by the appearance of Henri Tolberg, and close behind him another, and another ; a whole group of dark-featured men entering with salutations to Auber, and eager glances cast round the room for Faustine.

Dreamy, excitable, with feverish, restless glance as ever, Henri Tolberg still looked refined and intellectual, a high type of the skilful artisan. He still looked melancholy and life-worn, and even more than ever the fire of fanaticism burnt in his dark eyes. He was a Gobelins master-teacher of high standing now, and he dabbled in literature, wrote in journals, spoke at noisy cafés as a member of many queer societies, but he was, like Auber, a peace man, and an advocate for the workmen resting solely upon themselves.

Victor turned to Piers again, and introduced Henri as the friend of whom he had often spoken ; and Piers, looking into the delicate face, wondered, as he held out his hand to the Gobelins workman, over the refinement and the intellect it expressed. A type of a class was Henri Tolberg, not rare among the men whose busy brains and subtle fingers beautify our modern homes: he might have sat with grace in any of the splendid rooms where his tapestries hung. Victor was very fond of him, and meant Piers to be the same ; so he left them to talk together as he strolled through the room, and picked out his old acquaintances from the gathering crowd.

Faustine came back presently, and was enthusiastically received. Then a servant came in, and covered the centre table with coffee, with glasses of bonbons, with *vin ordinaire*, and fruit ; and the guests continued to arrive.

They were a curious assemblage, these adorers of Faustine—men who came from every corner of Paris—followers of every kind of profession, devotees to every form of art.

There was a thick sprinkling of the “artists du Louvre,” pale-faced youths with delicate moustache,

long silky curls, and much general poetic *abandon* costume. They were not, as a rule, loud talkers in a group. They lounged on the sofas; they passed their fingers continually through their hair; they looked often for inspiration towards the ceiling; they sipped coffee and crunched Faustine's bonbons between their white teeth, and later, with her permission they lit their paper cigars.

Then the students from the "Quartier Latin" came out strongly,—strong in number, strong in costume, hair thick and short cut, incipient imperial and moustache, round jackets and tight pantaloons of a checked pattern, vast and astonishing. Quick-brained, red-tongued young fellows these, latent volcanoes, with smouldering fires Faustine fanned with assiduous energy and zeal.

There were older men—journalists; some serious and carefully costumed, ringed, scented, and adorned with some of the Bohemian school, of the "hyacinthine locks, wildly floating," of uncombed and unwashed appearance, with a superabundance of hair, a minimum of shirt-collar, if any at all.

A curious, noisy, diversified, loud-talking assembly. They clustered about Dax's chair; they lounged over the centre table; they stood in respectful deference around Faustine. They lit their cigars; they sipped coffee; they crunched bonbons; and altogether made as curious a medley as it had been Piers's fate to see.

Standing talking to Henri for some time, he changed with him the sentiments, peaceable, individualistic, and humane, of the old "Universalist."—listening, as they ceased their talk, he heard many contending and very different opinions vociferated round him on every side.

The large fat man stood near him, laying down the law to an attentive circle. He struck a fat forefinger on the palm of his left hand, as Piers turned to look

to him, and with solemn emphasis enunciated the sentiment, "Society must be wound up!"

"Ah! just so." The answer came from behind a trio of cigarettes, and from the circle of eager faces.

"Yes, wound up!" he continued; "forced to give in its accounts, swept of its three direst enemies—property, the family, and the crown."

"And forced by whom?" said Victor coolly; for he had observed the coterie to which Piers had attached himself, and he approached, determined to draw out the opinions of Jean Bouchet, and let his friend hear this extreme Communistic topic vigorously aired.

"Forced by the government of a communal assembly!" exclaimed Bouchet, prophet of this school. "An assembly elected by the free votes of a universal electoral power; that is, the votes of the whole nation, women as well as men, poor as well as rich,—an assembly of chosen representatives, constituting a commune; in other words, the State. Their first office shall be to wind up society and to reconstitute it."

"Reconstitute it through the *enforced* acceptance of their own laws? I beg your pardon, M. Bouchet, I have been absent from France, as you know, two years; things have been advancing since I was last here. Will you enlighten me a little, on the development that it is evident has taken place in the views of many Universalists since my departure?"

"With pleasure, *mon ami*. The march of enlightenment is indeed rapid; the Empire shakes to its foundation; the men of free opinion, of advanced views, increase round us every day. The crisis approaches: society, I say, will be wound up."

"By the agency of this new State?"

"By its agency, certainly. It will drag down the rich to the level of his fellow-creature; it will abolish accumulated capital; it will prohibit territorial possession; it will extinguish the old worn-out superstition that is ever prone to reproduce the vampires of mon-

archy and the delusions of religion; and, most important of all, it will exterminate these social institutions that result in selfish and individual concentration of a man's interests and energies on his household, practically on himself. Thus we shall escape all laws of inheritance, all absorption of property for individual interests, and cause a gravitation of every valuable element in the community towards the central interests of the State."

"Abolish, exterminate, prohibit, extinguish, annihilate!" said Victor. "These seem to me, M. Bouchet, strange words to be descriptive of the powers of a State, professing itself on the side of national freedom."

"Only powers, my dear sir," said Bouchet softly, "with which; understand me, the nation of its own free-will will endow an elected Assembly, who stand merely in the position of national agents appointed for the accomplishment of certain political and social reforms."

Victor and Piers moved away. There was a grave anxious expression, at once sad and angry, on Victor's usually sunny face.

"Ah!" he exclaimed to Piers as they stood a moment together, "the death-knell of Liberty certainly sounds in such doctrines as these. What was ever, in the world's history, so ruthlessly tyrannical as that *Assemblée* of the first Revolution? What could imagination conceive more despotic, more annihilating to a national character than a State authority that organized and appointed in such a way as that the private concerns of men?"

"These are certainly not the views which I conceived of the ideal of our Universal," said Piers.

"No!" cried Victor, with a ring of bitter pain in his voice. "They call themselves followers of Mazzini. *Dieu!* if they could only listen to his words. He has analyzed all these ideas thoroughly. He has shown Fourier and Babœuf in their true light; and

these men profess a love of him, and preach the doctrines he abhors. Bah! Let us listen here: we will have a word or two from Père Dax, that will doubtless expunge that bad-tasting language from our minds. Ah! political economists, most of these men here: more in the right vein."

A man was speaking as they paused at this group, —a solid, thoughtful-looking man, whose face had neither the excitability nor the bitter cynicism that distinguished most of his neighbors. He spoke like Friedrich Hanker, with a German accent, and spoke slowly and heavily, but with powerful emphasis and with effect. Hanker himself sat near him, and put a word in now and then; and Dax listened, his thin hands folded on his knees, his eyes, kindling and full of attention, raised to the speaker's face, his lip quivering sometimes with agitation, as he watched his turn to reply.

CHAPTER XIX.

FAUSTINE'S COURT.

ALL this time, Piers Ashton's eyes had been wandering to another group, and he could see all the while Bouchet, Auber, and others were speaking, and he and Victor standing near; that, from this third group, glances of two dark eyes were constantly turned upon them, as if claiming their attention, and chafing at their delay. These eyes, full of watchful inquiry, rested often upon himself, thrilling him as he felt them turn to him with an electric influence that drew his thoughts instantly from the most interesting theories of Bouchet or Auber. Quite unconsciously his own gaze turned ever to answer hers, but always just in time to see the dark eyes pass from him, to rest on

Victor's slight form and eager face. The gaze then became full of impatience—full of *something*—it puzzled Piers to understand.

She was always quarrelling with Victor, he remembered ; yet, he wished somehow, with a curious, undefined, inexplicable sense of longing within his heart, that when her eyes turned his way instead of towards Victor, that they would rest with just such an expression on him !

Victor's brow knit again for a moment, much as it had done when he listened to Bouchet, as now, turning from Père Auber, and the group round his chair, he approached the little alcove, where, on a low settee, sat Faustine, surrounded by her adorers, her disciples, and her brother teachers of her own school.

She looked very beautiful as she leaned back, one arm lying easily on the cushion by her side, the other raised often when she spoke, to enforce with energetic emphasis her words. Her head, with its plaits of black hair coiled round and round it, was thrown proudly back. She looked from one to the other of the excited faces that bent eagerly towards her ; her eyes glistened with mingled expression, and a touch of scorn and bitterness curled her crimson lip.

She was very simply dressed ; nothing of the *grande dame, en toilette de soir*, about her as she received her friends. Her dark-colored gown was high nearly to the neck, with sleeves reaching to the elbow, a single row of beautiful lace falling back from the statuesque throat, and over the shapely arms. A rich creamy "rose de Provence" was her only ornament. She looked dark and shadowy, yet brilliant,—with that soft brilliancy with which the flowers gleam, as they nestle in their dark-green foliage, beneath the moonlight of an Eastern night.

The tall, striking-looking man, who wore the diamond ring, sat near her, lounging carelessly, leaning *one arm* on the back of his chair, as he smoothed *continually* his black beard and moustache. His eyes

rested upon Faustine often with undisguised admiration, and sometimes with no little amusement.

She was excited and fervent in her political demonstrations; and it amused him, for he was cool and cynical in his. It was part of his profession indeed to fire excitement in other brains; he rarely committed the error of exciting himself. Raoul Regnau's pen lighted many a flame, and fanned many a smoking heart to furnace-heat.

He professed to worship an ideal Republic, a free and perfect Commune. In reality he worshipped—Raoul Regnau; and no one, or nothing, else than him. He admired Faustine, and imagined he loved her. He served her as a disciple of her ideas, really because—in serving her, he advanced himself; in obeying her, he gained power over her adherents; in holding his place as first in the rank of her adorers, he acquired sway, by subtle dexterity, over every other man who surrounded her with him.

Raoul Regnau held himself to be the only man destined, worthy, or capable, to hold this power; and, in his dream of reform and revolution, the new government had always this central point. One woman—he thought worthy to share this with him; and, in the vision of new Paris, he saw her enthroned by his side.

Why not? Paris was hopefully blind, easily excited, easily deceived! *Tout vient à ceux qui savent attendre.* Raoul Regnau waited; and, meanwhile, with tongue and pen and money he winged surely his shafts, and sent them far and wide.

Ah, that volatile nation had some touchstone, by which to test the truth—and the lie!

Another figure prominent in the group around Faustine was a graceful, eager-eyed man, with pointed imperial and moustache, who stood leaning with one knee on his chair, looking with quick glances from Regnau to her.

Another was a young officer in the rich uniform c

the Imperial Guard. He took no part in the discussion, but stood back on the fringe of the circle, satisfied to listen and gaze in silence at Faustine. Truly her adorers and disciples formed a group of strangely diversified and contrasting characters.

Victor whispered to Piers, as they paused near, "Look at Henri Rochecarre," he said, pointing to the young man who leaned upon the chair. "He is a fine fellow in a scatterbrain sort of way; genuine, though, to the core; unsound, unsafe, but true to his profession. He is a vicomte of a very old family in the Landes; but he has given himself up to revolutionary politics, to journal-writing and speech-making, and has flung his title to the winds. He has great talent: I wish he had an ounce or two of ballast in his brain. And there is Eugène de Valéry," he continued, indicating the young officer. "Poor boy! he has no right to be here: that uniform has no place among us. I suppose the attractions are those black orbs of Faustine. Little mischief-maker! A strange sort of fellow that," he added, signing towards the white hand raised, at that moment, with its flashing ring: "I do not make him out. Let us join in and listen. Ah, Henri, *mon cher!*"

This was to Henri Tolberg, who stood near them, and who turned as Victor laid his hand caressingly on his shoulder.

"Hot revolutionary politics?" said Victor inquiringly to him.

Henri scarcely answered; he only shook his head.

"Ah, Henri!" said Victor, sadly; and then he nodded with a smile to Faustine.

"Here is our prodigal!" cried Henri Rochecarre, laughing. "Victor, *mon ami*, I thought you had deserted us entirely. I expected to hear you were sitting for a heavy British constituency as an English M. P."

"Not international enough yet in this world for

that, Rochecarre; besides, my fatherland claims my first love still."

"But you are a great man. What do you call yourself in that barbaric tongue? A 'R-r-r-anglair?'" continued Rochecarre.

"A 'seignor R-ranglair de Cambreedge,'" exclaimed Raoul, "it is no small thing to be. We look to you, Lescar, to do grand things among us. You will be our greatest hero, *mon cher*," he added, in a mellow, flattering tone.

"Not while Raoul Regnau is one of us," responded Victor, with a touch of irony in his voice.

"No, no, I am no 'seignor R-ranglair,' no great educational hero, I!" said Raoul. "But we shall see: in that day when the great crisis comes, every man will have his chance, my friends; every man the occasion to evince what power is his."

Faustine's eyes were raised to Victor softly, for a moment, as she answered Raoul's remark.

"And in that day the good and great among men will become dominant, and heroes stand in their own true place."

"All will be heroes," said Raoul, pompously. "The thrill of glorious Liberty will fill every heart with heroic power; a nation of heroes of freedom will spring where we now see a nation of slaves."

"It goes so slowly," exclaimed Faustine, passionately. "We meet, we discuss, we scheme, we see visions of our success; but action is nowhere. Every one of you," she continued, flashing her eyes upon them with angry scorn, "can talk, and write, and speechify; not one of you can *do*."

"The time is not ripe," replied Regnau. "The men are ready; we wait but the hour; and it goes fast, not slow. The Empire is tottering; our emissaries have penetrated the secrets of its strongest force, our agents are at work everywhere; the army is disaffected, the people are irritated and inflammable; *the seed that fell in each precious drop of the martyred*

blood of Orsini has sunk into a fertile soil, and the harvest has sprung up. Again and again, as it ripens, we pluck it, and recast it again—each year over wider fields, each year reaching farther; each sowing piercing more deep. The time is at hand; be patient but a little still: it is at hand.”

“An organized revolution?” said Victor.

“The rising of an army, in which I see you a leader, M. Lescar—the army of Liberty, the champions of a republic, the children of the Commune; the ‘Universal’ born at last into real and vigorous life: the day draws near.”

“The Emperor *must* have war at home or abroad before long; no doubt of that,” put in Henri Rochecarre. “We will help him quietly by fanning the home-flames and—leave him to fight his foreign battles for himself.”

“Yes, war is the first step,” exclaimed Regnau, “and war is not far distant, as you say, Rochecarre.”

“God forbid!” was Victor’s ejaculation, which drew the circle of angry eyes to his face.

“What—*Dieu défend*?” cried Raoul Regnau—“war, that will draw off the troops from Paris, waste the military strength of the Empire, open the way for us to go safely on! You understand little the schemes of your confrères, *mon cher* Lescar.”

“I believe I do,” was Victor’s answer. “I understand the Universal, M. Regnau: the Commune is a new birth since I was last in France.”

“Then, Monsieur segnor R-ranglair, you have much to learn,” retorted Raoul. “When you are a little longer in the ranks of your Cause again, you will understand that war is the demand of the nation, and a *necessity* for us.”

“And our Cause was peace,” cried Victor bitterly.

“Its end—yes,” said Raoul; “but its means inevitably must be war. Read the advanced journals, *mon-sieur*, *such*, for instance, as I have the honor, as all *here* know,—though not in my own name,—to edit,

and the programme proposed and foreseen by all of us will become clearer to your mind—if," he added, sarcastically, "I may venture to suggest information from a humble journal of Paris to a signor R-ranglair of Cambreedge."

Evidently, from the ill-concealed bitterness of his tone, there was something in the bright quick spirit and eager countenance of Victor Lescar that excited jealous rancor in the questionable sublimity of Raoul Regnau's soul.

Victor moved away a little, but paused and turned to Faustine a moment, disregarding all answer to Regnau's last remark; for old experience had told him that, without much fortitude of forbearance, these political and so-called world-wide discussions were very prone to narrow into personal channels, and to ripen into unpleasant results. He had no wish to cross swords or exchange a pistol-shot with M. Raoul Regnau for the honor of the "Cambreedge R-ranglair."

"Faustine," he said brightly, "do you not grace your receptions in these days with your songs; or have the times grown too severe and serious?"

"No; we often have songs," she answered. "We have several musicians among us. *You* sing, Victor: will you?" she added, with a softening voice. "It is long since we have heard you."

He obeyed her, and went to the little piano: it was agreeable to his own impulse to do so as well. Raoul Regnau, with his conceited patronage and his mellow tones of sarcastic flattery, had irritated him more almost than he could bear, and he fled to music as a panacea—to song to insure silence from retorting speech.

He struck the notes, and swept his fingers vigorously over them, in the strong effort to recall harmony to his spirit, and to invoke peace and purity of inner vision in his disturbed and darkened soul. He played he scarcely knew what, his eyes wandering sadly over *the excited scene*. He played only, and sang nothing.

so they did not cease their noisy talk ; but from every group there reached him those jarring voices ; round every speaker he could see those circles of dark heated faces, those thirsty eager eyes.

Still he played on. And Piers lingered by the knot round the sofa, and saw (though Victor never observed it) that as he played, now dreamily and soft now with passionate vigor, that Faustine's head drooped till it rested on her hand with a gesture of weariness, that her eyes sank, and were raised again to wander many times beyond the faces around her to the corner where the player sat, and that her voice ceased utterly to mingle in the noisy tumult about her and her ear to hear anything save the sweet harmony that floated to her restless spirit, and reached her through and above them all.

She rose at length, swept past Piers as he stood by Henri Tolberg, pushed her way through the circle of her disciples, and, all regardless of Raoul's glance of jealous anger, she moved to Victor's side.

He looked up and smiled to her, as she came near to him, and leant her arm on the piano. She raised her hand to her forehead, and swept back her dark hair.

"You have not lost the Orpheus touch yet, Victor," she said, softly. "You still play to exorcise, or to inspire."

"Would I could exorcise ; would I could inspire," he murmured as he played on. "We need both powers sadly here."

"Bah !" she exclaimed, with an angry shadow on her softened face, "you are dreaming yet, Victor. We must be practical and real in our schemes ; we must float on the tide as it *is*, not as we dream it to be. We must strike the blows of our Cause where the force of our blows will tell."

"*Chère*," he said, taking his fingers from the keys, and looking earnestly up at her, "blows never were our scheme. I am a soldier by my birth, F"

ine, I am no chicken-heart, or no poltroon ; but the strength of my blows and the force of my arm are for the enemies, not the children, of France."

"Bah !" she exclaimed again. "Let me tell you of it all, but not now ; they are coming round us. But, later, let me tell you, Victor. You do not know all that we have done since you left us. You do not know what a career opens, what a field there is, for such as you. I say you do not know your colors when you see them ; you do not recognize your own interests when they are visible and near. I must tell you later. Ah ! Monsieur Regnau, you draw near : you too, then, appreciate such music as this ?"

"I appreciate above all," he answered with much *empressement*, "the strains of a voice that has been still too long. It is many evenings since you have favored us, you, our goddess and our queen."

"I sing little now," she answered.

"But sing to-night, Faustine," interrupted Victor, "for old friendship's sake," he added softly in English, which only Piers, of those now close round them, understood. "I want my friend to hear—as I have often promised to him he should hear—the voice that used to brighten for both of us our old St. Marteau home. I hope new theories, Faustine, have not extinguished old favorite songs."

Raoul Regnau's eyes turned with an angry glare as Victor bent, with a winning but quite familiar and brotherly courtesy, towards Faustine, as he murmured in a low tone these words in a tongue not understood by Raoul. And the black eyes of the revolutionist grew angrier still, as Faustine, with a strange, unusual gleam of tenderness in hers, sat down at Victor's request, and awoke the piano, once more, with a touch so soft and melodious that even old Dax ceased his discussion, and looked up, with a bright smile of pleasure, to listen.

In one moment every voice was hushed ; for the notes arose from a deep, rich beautiful contralto. She

sang a few bars of an old Provençal song, with a passion and tenderness that thrilled every wild heart among them, and made Piers Ashton's eye glisten and his cheek crimson again.

Just a few bars, while her eyes sought Victor's, and met in his an answer bright and well pleased as he recognized and smiled his thanks for a familiar strain. A moment her glance rested on him, the expression of wistful, longing tenderness searching vainly for something more, something really responsive to her heart's cry, in the answer of his, and then—she ceased, quite suddenly, her sweet soul-stirring song but just began; she ceased, and threw her head up, and averted her eyes from his; she took her hands from the keys with an impatient gesture, and a cloud of angry, bitter disappointment swept over her face; she tossed her hair back once more from her darkened brow, and she gathered herself together with a strong effort, and drove her softened mood away.

"Ah!"—a long chorus of disappointment broke from every voice.

"Nonsense!" she responded, impatiently; "there are better subjects for songs. Listen! Bah! *I* will inspire you, one and all, my friends. Listen! echo and reply. The windows are closed, are they not, and fast? the doors are shut? Listen! here is something stirring and true."

And she struck the notes again with angry vigor; she pitched again her voice, this time loud, enthusiastic, powerful, filling the room, and a wild chorus of delight greeted her as she rang out the stormy notes of the "*Marseillaise*."

"I could not have helped it," she exclaimed, when she had finished, "if it had cost us all a year in St. Pélagie! Good night, my friends, good night!"

She rose as she finished, and turned to extend her left hand with a gesture of dismissal to Regnau, who stood with arms folded and with lowering glance, at her side. He took her hand and bent over it, but she

rew it carelessly away before it had touched his ps.

"*Au revoir!* it is late," she said; and Dax also ose.

With a few more words their guests—accepting their accustomed dismissal—one by one, or in knots of indred thinkers, bowed their farewells.

The room was emptied of its curious assemblage, the motley crowd to whom Dax threw it open evening after evening in behalf of the Cause—that Cause which seemed chiefly to advance by the efforts of its dherents, on these ocasions, to talk much and loud: having done this patriotic duty well and bravely—they dispersed.

"Stay," said Faustine, in a low tone, as Victor approached her. "You need not go. My grandfather has ot had a word with you. Stay, you—and your friend also," she added, as Piers drew near. "Stay," she ontinued to him, letting him take her right hand for a moment in his English way, and detaining him as he watched the others go;—Henri Tolberg, wistful and unwilling; Rochecarre, smiling and full of courageous grace; Regnau, dignified and angrily jealous gain as he saw Victor pause.

Bouchet stopped Victor as he passed, and held him, button-holed, for a moment while he said,—

"Lescar, I have announced a series of papers by you in *La Cloche* immediately on your return. Will you let me have them? Your own price, you know."

"On what?" asked Victor.

"On English politics and their prospects from our point of view."

"Ours?" said the other, emphatically.

"Yes, yes; nothing extreme in *La Cloche*: a safe, sound journal; comes out under the editorship of my own name. Do not fear. Look in on me to-night—No. 2, Rue Calodien, you know—any time before four to-morrow morning, and we shall settle it without delay. Do not disappoint me, Lescar. I have promised

the public ; and you gave me your promise before you went away."

"Yes," said Victor, "I gave my word to the Cause many a day ago. The difficulty now is to see how I *can* serve it. But I will come, Bouc knows the Rue Calodien. I may bring my friend ; he is safe as need be, and as true as steel."

"Oh, yes, bring him : we will drink a little together and clench the small affair. Your own word is the matter. That is it—very well. Then—at to-night we shall see you. Till then—adieu."

CHAPTER XX.

"POURTANT FEMME."

WHEN they were all gone, Faustine returned to her seat behind the piano again, and Piers was sitting near her—for Victor had sat down by old Bouc—but Faustine, after striking a few chords and calling to him.

"Victor, I want you here."

He rose and crossed the room to her, and turned and took his place by the old man's side in the conversation, at any other time, would have been with Piers. But Piers could listen to none of that to-night. His eyes, with that strange new expression, wandered constantly to the piano ; and his attention became absorbed there as well, as he watched the two, and caught broken sentences of their conversation, reaching him, as in their eagerness and excitement their voices overpowered Dax's gentle tones.

Faustine sat at the piano, Victor leaning over it and bending towards her.

"Victor," she said, as he came in obediently.

all, and waited to hear what she wished to say to him, you must *not* quarrel with Raoul Regnaud."

"Not if he does not insist on quarrelling with me," e replied.

"Friend," she cried passionately, clasping her hands together, "I have been working for you all these years, while you have been away girding on the armor you have chosen for yourself. I have remained here, calling together your army, preparing your field; and now, you have come back, and I see it, Victor, I see it,—the armor is upon you; your power has grown strong; the vigor of a leader speaks in your voice, and commands men against their will. You have come back to us, *ready*. I see what it has done for you; the culture they lack with all their quickness here—you have it, Victor. You could rule them; you have but to appear, you have but to give your power to the true work, and your mind to understand its ways, and you would be chosen without rival as our leader, our president, our general, our king!"

He shook his head.

"Faustine," he said, "you forget I am a Universalist."

"We all are," she answered impatiently. "Victor, Victor, do not hang back. I have done it all for you—for you, my old friend, my childhood's friend. Take your part, and study your part with those who can teach you. Henri Tolberg, for instance; he thinks as *you* think in many points, but he shares with me the conviction that you *are* our destined leader. Do not disappoint us, Victor."

"What would you have me to do?" he said again earnestly; "what would you have me do? I cannot join these fiery agitators. I hate conspiracy; I hate street riot and civil revolt: the whole thing is repugnant to me. I dislike the men who represent it. I see no good to any class of our fellow-creatures to arise from *any possible result*."

"*Result!*" she exclaimed again. "The result

would be your career, Victor—a great, a sublime career. You would be leader and commander among the people; you would fill the place for which you alone are worthy. Dear friend, do not disappoint me; do not quarrel with them all. Go to Bouchet to-night; go to the Café Carnier in the Rue Duplas. See how events are hurrying on, Victor; see how true it is that men must join in the general advance. Recollect your plighted word; I heard you first give it here: you are a Universalist—do not forget. He—the dear revered one there—is but its far-off dreamer; those men to whom you go to-night are its sinews and its strength. Go to them, Victor; study their spirit; throw yourself into the ranks; take your place as their leader; speak, let yourself be felt among them, *unequalled* as you are, and Raoul, the noisy boaster, will not oppose or quarrel with you, but will yield the throne of President unresistingly to you."

Even Faustine had not read the depth of Raoul Regnau yet.

"He felt his master in you to-night, Victor," she continued; "but you must make him feel it more: you must make him own it even to silence, and he will do it. When you raised your word, he recognized you—master in the coming day—and he dropped his savage bloodhound eyes. I hate Raoul Regnau: you must conquer him."

"My dear friend, I will go to Bouchet's to-night, because I promised to go. I will not forget that I am a plighted Universalist; and I will serve the Universal by every effort in my power. But your dream seems vaguer to me than the father's, Faustine; and I do not yet see the duties which you insinuate honor calls me to perform. When I see them, fear not, I will be ready. But, Faustine," he added, "do not mistake me. I do not hate the Empire; I am not prepared to avenge the blood of Félice Orsini, who died as a *regicide* should die. And should you ever find me fighting with my brother Frenchmen on our French soil, you

may say with truth that I am *mad* indeed! I can conceive no more horrible condition of things."

"I doubt if you could fight at all, Victor," she exclaimed, with a momentary flash of disappointment and scorn.

"Not fight against the enemy of France, Faustine? You have known me long," was all his reply.

"And I know you well," she continued, turning to him softened and repentant again. "Dear friend, forgive. Amongst us all, you are noblest—best. But," and she paused again, and laid her hand suddenly with impulsive eagerness on his, "Victor, I have done it *all* for you; will you desert the Cause? Will you not accept a great career?—will you not take it, and adorn it, and rule in it; if not for its own sake, Victor, will you not do it for—mine?" And she turned her dark face up to his, glowing with excitement, full of witching, entreating power. And he looked down upon her for a long moment, that would have worked in most hearts of their community madness enough to excuse any promise or any deed.

A long moment; then he became very grave. A thought that had often troubled his spirit came to him, and he spoke it then:

"Faustine," he said, "you are very, very beautiful! You—should weigh *earnestly* your strong power over men."

"Victor!" her voice still softened. Had she any power over him, then?

He continued:

"Old, dear friend, you are rushing on a stormy way; you have lost sight of old goals. I can accept no such career as you conceive for me. I will go to Bouchet's to-night, as I tell you; but if the Universal have no other work for me than you describe, Faustine, I will enter the army, and join my father in Algiers without delay. And," he continued, gently taking the hand she had laid so impetuously on his into his own again, "*dear sister, dear early friend, turn with me;*

leave these wild thorny ways ; be a woman in tenderness, as you are rich in every womanly fair with every womanly grace."

"Dear brother !" she answered him, with sarcasm wrung from her aching, passionate heart. "dear brother, I have many brothers besides you. I cannot desert them all to obey you, who are but I understand plighted word and honor as they stand it ; and many among them have caught interpretation from me. I will be true to them, my brother, even if you are untrue to us all."

"Untrue, Faustine ! unworthy of you ! un- he murmured in a pained and regretful voice.

"Victor ! Victor !" She turned to him again and her hand caught his once more ; she looked up to him and her quick mood all changed again, "Victor, forgive me."

He touched his lips to her hand, with a brotherly caress, and smiled in reconciliation.

"A truce to politics !" he said ; and then he turned to Auber and Piers.

"You cannot be tired of waiting, I know Père Dax to talk to, Piers," he said with a smile. "But is very late ; even Bouchet will be going and Père Dax, how bad for you ! Shame on Faustine, to keep him from his rest so long revoir."

CHAPTER XXI.

SECRET SPRINGS.

PÈRE DAX lived in the north-west quarter of the city beyond the Caserne du Prince Eugène ; and Piers and Victor emerged from the quiet little *St. Etienne*, they found themselves near the

passing the Cirque Napoléon, and down the Boulevard Beaumarchais into the Place de la Bastille.

In the little secluded street behind the Boulevards, into which they at last turned, there were few lights, and little remaining evidences of humanity active and awake.

Before a humble enough door at one end, Victor paused. A lamp stood just in front of it, and in its lustre a brass plate might be seen engraved with the name, "Jean Bouchet, Artist de Portrait."

He turned round a moment to Piers, before he rang the bell.

"I am going to write on his staff, you know, but only for *La Cloche*. I will not give a line of mine to their infamous secret circulations; but I am going to buckle to the other at once, Piers. It is the only work I see open just now to do."

"I do not see the way to any work at all, among all those fellows of yours," said Piers.

"Ah!" sighed Victor, "wait; we shall see. Let us go upstairs."

The door was opened slowly; but, on Victor's uttering a few words in French, it was thrown widely back, and they passed within.

"Upstairs," said the person who had admitted them; "*montez, messieurs*"—

Up they went.

"To the right," he shouted behind them; and Victor opened the door he indicated, and preceded Piers into a brightly lit room.

Bouchet sat at a centre table, pen in hand, ink-horn before him, a mass of papers, print and manuscript, lying at each hand. His rough laugh rose again and again, as he perused the lines before him, and drew his pen through words here and there, or wrote notes interlined or on the margin.

It was a roughly furnished room. Wooden tables and common chairs, a rack for papers, a shelf for a few dirty books, a number of ink-bottles, and piles of

journal proofs, were its only contents, save that the mantel-shelf was covered with brandy bottles, empty and full. The glasses seemed all in request.

Two men sat at a table behind Bouchet, one reading to the other in a low murmur, while, with rapid pen and quick gesture of arrest or continuance to the reader, the other man corrected "proof."

"Ha!" Bouchet cried, as Victor and Piers both entered. "Good!" He held his finger up over his shoulder, as they approached behind him. "One moment, messieurs: wait, I have just finished. Listen! this is the leader of to-morrow for the *Drapeau*."

He continued to read aloud; and Piers was edified by the views, current even at that date, in the fatal little journal, destined in time to come to shed more blood, to infuse more poisoned venom into the fevered minds of poor doomed Paris, than any other of all the score of lying journals of the Commune.

A shadow of days to come greeted Victor and Piers in the issue of that evening's proof. Victor's eyes glistened angrily again, and a hot flush covered his cheek, as he listened—he blushed for truth, for honor—for the future of France.

"Can I write for this man?" rose the question, again and again, in his perplexed and excited mind. "Can the same fountain bring sweet and bitter? Can the same office issue journals speaking truth and lies?"

"*Sacré*, Bouchet!" he exclaimed.

"*Tiens, tiens, doucement!*" cried the other. "I know this is not your school. You want the way paved for you, my little friends, and you will ride merrily some day over the stones; but you will not have a finger in the laying,—no, no, we will do that—Pyat, Vermorat, and I. Fear not; we will pave the road, and when it is ready, my soldiers,—we will send for you. Meanwhile, *laissez faire*. There is your *place*, Monsieur Victor—Fermesch, that will do," he

continued, returning the proofs to his opposite friend. "Now, Lescar, listen ! I have promised you for tomorrow. Here is pen, ink, and paper,—we only want a single page ; and here is the evening *Courier* for your friend, while he waits for you. Your full signature, you know ; they will all recognize you. I sent you the articles we have been writing on your achievements at Cambridge, and our French senior wrangler is expected with excitement. Write, my friend—write."

Victor took the pen in his hand, and sat down at the corner table prepared for him, taking that place for the first time as a leading journalist of France—the place with which he was destined to be so often hereafter identified, the post—that was to cost him so dear !

Bouchet had done his work, and he and his companion, Eugène Fermesch, withdrew to a distant table at the other end of the room, and signed to Piers, with rough courtesy, to approach them.

Bouchet poured out a fiery *petit verre*, which he proffered with hospitable intent. Piers shook his head.

"What !—no ? I forgot—English ; you do not drink *le petit verre cognac* : *le sherry*—ah ! what a pity I have none."

"Do not mind, thank you," Piers replied. "I want nothing."

"Ah, but here—*tiens*. You will drink eau-de-selz, with a dash of cognac ? ah, yes ! That is the beverage, is it not, of your English 'clobs ?' A friend of mine in the 'Jockey,' a monsieur who is in everything perfectly *Britannique*, he drinks nine and ten eau-de-selz with cognac every night, and says it is just as they do in London. Nasty, I think ; but nations have their tastes. I prefer 'cognac simple.' You will drink ?"

"Thank you, monsieur, with your permission," said Piers, feeling companionship in the favorite occupation of imbibing something was necessary to ensure

companionable interchange of intellectual resource. "You have a busy life of it here."

"Ah, very—yes! Very fatiguing, very exciting. We wield the sword of the nations here," he exclaimed, flourishing under Piers's nose the inky stump of a much-worn pen. "The sword of the nations, here it is! Yes, the pen! The journal, and what you call the 'spitch,' these are the strong power of the times that be. And there is a third power we can use later; do you know it?—the *placard*! Words, words, monsieur; we can do everything in our day by the force of words. Ah, he is using the sword there, my young friend; by-and-by, doubtless, he will use it well."

* * * * *

"Piers," said Victor, as half an hour later they stood out in the darkened street again, "I heard much that Bouchet and Fermesch said to you. Words, the sword of the nations—the real power that subverts and alters destinies in nations and the individual history of men. I remember the same idea once spoken in a very different voice—a voice that fixed much in my destiny for me. Did you ever hear Père Lacordaire? Of course you did not; you have never been before in France. I owe it to Père Lacordaire that I reverence the spirit-power in language, the superiority of intellect to all physical force. I owe it to another (you do not know him either), Père Hyacinthe, that I am not a Socialist, a Republican, and a rank Communist. These two men made me think new thoughts of life and the things of men; and yet—they were Catholic priests, and I a Protestant. Was it not strange?"

Piers had not time to answer him. They were walking through the Rue St. Antoine, beyond the Boulevard Sebastopol, towards the Palais de Justice, and had reached the Rue Rivoli. A brilliant illumination from globe lamps, pendant above a large swinging glass door, caught their attention here.

"The 'Cercle,'" said Victor, just as the door swung open, and two men emerged. One ran quickly

down the stone steps, and turned and walked before them under the colonnade along the street. The other paused on the lowest step. He twirled his light cane between two slim white fingers, on one of which glittered a diamond ring, and he took his cigarette from his mouth as the two friends passed close to him.

"Ha! *mon ami*," he cried suddenly; and he stretched out his cane, and touched Victor lightly on the shoulder.

They stopped. It was Raoul.

"Ha, ha!" he said again, with his harsh sarcastic laugh. "Whither away so fast, *mes chers Damon et Pythias*? You show our young Englishman something of *la vie Parisienne*, Lescar?"

"We have been to Bouchet's," said Victor gravely, looking into Regnau's face as he stood on the step above him.

"Hush!" the other replied, with an anxious glance over his shoulder. "Not a word of *him* here."

"I had promised him an article for *La Cloche*," said Victor in a lower tone.

"Peste!" exclaimed Raoul, blowing away from his lips the smoke of his cigarette. "Bah! a truce to business. One cannot always be in harness, *cher* Victor; one cannot always lead that *vie sévère*. I have banished politics and discussions from my mind two hours ago,—blew them off with the smoke of a regalia as I came round the corner of the Place St. Etienne with Eugène de Valéry. One does enough of the great heroics, *mon Dieu!* under the fiery eyes of the fair Faustine. Then, enough!—a truce to weary politics."

A group of young men followed them closely at that moment, and Raoul paused, turned aside slightly, and let them pass.

"He is a man of some power," said Piers.

"Yes, considerable: the power rather of assuming power, of adopting it to himself, as it were; the sort

of faculty to which many men are apt to succumb,—the power that, exercised without scruple, can often gain influence before people are well aware. He has a love of power and a thirst for authority, that he veils at present under that gilded exterior of the young Parisian."

"I do not like his face," said Piers.

"No; it is a cruel eye, and those red lips under his black moustache give him a sort of sanguinary look it is difficult to define. He is a quarrelsome, duelling sort of fellow; do not you get into any rows with him, Piers."

"He was amiable enough to-night."

"Yes; but at the Place St. Etienne——"

"Ah, he was undoubtedly tigerish there: he did not look at either of us as if he liked new comers, Vic."

"No: I wonder what it means. He is not the sort of man to be in love, is he? He cannot care about Faustine."

"He did not like your appearance on the scene, at all events: I am quite sure of that."

"Ah, Faustine and I have been friends since we were children. It is absurd, if he thinks of being jealous of me. But still—I should not like to see her Madame Regnau."

"No, I should think not!" exclaimed Piers, turning away with cheeks suddenly crimson with indignation. "I should think not, indeed!—that horrid fellow! Good night, Vic."

So ended Piers's first day in Paris.

He stood alone when it was over, looking from his window up into the blue starry sky, listening to the ceaseless murmur of the city far down below him.

His mind was a chaos, and, more than all, he did not in heart, in feeling, in self-possession, seem—himself. Stronger than the memory of all these contending theorists, and warmer than any enthusiasm awakened by them, was that new glow in his heart,

that reflection of the dark, beautiful face of Faustine. The soft, deep tones of her voice, the light of her eyes, came back to him again and again, and with a keen sense of delight, as he remembered he was to see her to-morrow.

What could it mean? Why had she this power? He scarcely asked himself the question, for in all the range of his former theories there was no reply. He had planned his coming life, he had made up his mind, he had mapped out his history, quite regardless of the old warning and assertion of his favorite philosopher; so it was only the old, old story again:—

"There are more things, Horatio, in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy!"

CHAPTER XXII.

MODERN PATRIOTS.

THIS sort of life went on for many months, and after all the true "Universal" would have little to say to Piers Ashton.

They did not want an Englishman of fortune and social status among their ranks: they were a body of proletariats, they said, and had no place for such as he.

Victor Lescar, as one of their representative journalists, found a footing; but for Piers there seemed no need at all.

Among them, everywhere, were dreamers, pure patriots, true philanthropists—Aubers, Tolbergs, and, here and there, a Lescar. And these watched and mourned as the old beautiful dream flowed away from them, and they saw it widening into the stormy ocean, seeming to cover the earth.

What could such as Victor do, as they saw the evil

spreading, but make stand against it, and with pen and speech and passionate energy strive to oppose the pernicious powers?—raise voice continually, strain every nerve to purify the stains that blackened the principles of the “Universal” on every side.

To Piers it seemed, as he loitered on in Paris now, as if he had passed into a new and perplexing existence, there seemed so little connection between those visionary conferences of his and Victor’s in the summer evenings on the banks of the Cam, and the feverish struggle into which he saw Victor fling his energies now, and with which he himself seemed to have no part.

Central among them all stood Faustine, with her beauty, her powerful speech, her inspiring eyes; and to her the Cause meant—Victor! The doctrine was a Republic; the aim—power and distinction for him!

And to Piers, for the time being, the Cause became gradually—Faustine. It did not strike him how inactive was his own part in it all, while he could go out day by day, and evening after evening, to hear her inspiring voice, and to feel in her presence eager, ready for anything. In this occupation his time passed for many months just then.

Faustine became more and more to him daily, just then—the centre of all ambition, all future, all hopes; and she certainly favored him with unusual gentleness. She would single him out often from among her many rough adorers, by her enthusiastic glance and smile; and as he loitered by her evening after evening, and Victor was absent at other and busier scenes, it always seemed to Piers that the interest with which she regarded him was different from her manner to any other excepting Victor—and he, as Piers often repeated to himself, himself, was her childhood’s friend.

How long the sweet delusion and shadowy hopes of this period would have lasted for Piers, and how deeply its influence might have engraved itself on his *heart and future life*, it is difficult to say, had not fate

ained that on a certain evening—when he went as usual to the Place St. Etienne, where Faustine was doing her court—circumstances should combine to produce a climax in his sentiments and hopes.

He went there, treading his way in that dreamy, f-conscious condition to which love unspoken, scarce cognized or defined, reduces the mind. And he ended the little *salon*, to find Faustine surrounded by a noisy conclave, of which, contrary to the late custom, Victor formed one. She sat on the crimson sofa; and all the usual members of her society stood or sat near her.

Auber had his conclave in one corner. Henri Tolog leaned on the mantelpiece near Faustine's side. Raoul Regnau lounged in a chair in front of her. Others grouped behind him; and Victor stood, resting his hand on the end of the sofa over which she had thrown her arm.

He was bending towards her, and speaking earnestly as Piers came in. It surprised him to find Victor here. Their lives had drifted apart during these years. They seldom even dined together; for early in the evening, immediately the Paris working day was done, Victor's habit was to frequent the Debating Societies of the *ouvriers*, where every night he spoke answer and refutation of many things they were prone to assert; and later in the evening he went to other scenes—scenes that for Piers, in comparison with the reunion at the Place St. Etienne, had lost all attractive power.

But here was Victor to-night.

"I cannot approve, Faustine," he was saying earnestly, as Piers entered the room—"I cannot, I cannot!"

Raoul Regnau's lip curled, as he spoke, with a cold sarcastic smile.

"M. Lescar's approval is very requisite certainly all our arrangements!"

"Indispensable!" retorted Faustine, flashing her

eyes in defiance upon Raoul's face. "But listen, Victor; *mon cher*, listen. I cannot help myself. Duplat is a clever writer; Bouchet *will* have him as a member of the staff of the *Drapeau*: we must admit him here."

"There should be no law in our society that would involve such a 'must,'" said Victor gravely. "Fear not: Jean Bouchet will do without him. Duplat is a man I desire to meet in no society; much less, Faustine," he added, in a lower and softened tone, "do I wish to see him here."

"Happy Duplat, to have such a champion!—brave Duplat, to confront such a jealous dislike!" said Raoul.

"I am no champion of M. Duplat's," retorted Faustine angrily.

"And M. Lescar no rival?" added Raoul, smoothing his long beard, and glancing at Victor's absorbed and eager face.

"You do not defend him?—that is well. Then he comes not, Faustine," Victor continued. "You will give no countenance among us, by his reception here, to those infamous articles of his? That is well."

"He must come, Victor, I tell you: I have promised. Besides, we want him: he must come."

"We want him!—want an adherent whose weapon is falsehood; whose honor is less than an empty name; in whose writings, as in his spirit, reverence for truth, purity, and human well-being is entirely absent? I tell you, such men are the worst enemies of our Cause."

"Victor, this is nonsense," exclaimed Faustine. "Duplat must come; I have asked him here, and I am going to help him to the post which he desires. Victor, we fight on different sides; but we must fight thoroughly on whichever side is ours."

"*Chère*," he persisted, "be guided; give your help and influence where it cannot do evil, but good."

"*Peste!*" she ejaculated. "Be silent, Victor. Duplat comes here to-night."

Victor became grave: he raised his head, which all *this time* had been bent, towards her; he looked round

the different circles of faces crowding the room; and he caught his breath for a moment with a quick, impatient sigh.

"Faustine," he said, "then it must be so; and I must leave you. I cannot meet Duplat as an associate in the same room; I cannot meet him save as an enemy, despised and abhorred. I go, Faustine. Adieu!"

Raoul laughed hard and loud.

"This is interesting," he exclaimed; "a little quarrel of dear friends. M. Lescar conquered: Duplat, thanks to his fair champion, retains the field."

Faustine frowned darkly; she glanced with undisguised dislike towards Regnaud, and turned half-reluctingly again towards Victor, who stood still hesitating by her side.

"And, ah! here he comes," exclaimed Raoul suddenly, as the door opened again,— "here he comes, the new editor of the *Courier du Monde*, all unconscious of the peril which has threatened his position in this dainty salon and in the office of the famous *Cloche*. Enter, M. Duplat: let me present you at the footstool of our shrine. M. Jules Duplat, Mademoiselle Faustine."

Faustine bowed, with a repellent and undecided expression on her countenance, as Victor, turning his head away, moved from her side—and the new-comer approached her.

He was sufficiently unattractive in face and expression to justify Victor's prejudice and dislike,—a handsome enough man, with the same dissipated appearance that characterized Raoul—with cunning eyes, and a glance cruel and hard, with manners so self-possessed and self-confident that even the frigidity of Faustine's greeting failed to discompose him. He merely glanced with a look of inquiry and surprise towards Raoul, as he realized that his self-complacent bow was received with response so unflattering. He twirled his moustache, and bowed again; then he glanced round the room, as he waited for Faustine to address him, and suddenly encountered the gaze of Victor Lescar.

He startled slightly, but instantly recovered himself, and shrugging his shoulders with a Frenchman's cool nonchalance, he raised his eyebrows as he glanced at Raoul again.

Victor bowed gravely, and instantly passed from the room.

Faustine watched him ; for one moment her eyes softened and relented, and her lips moved as he turned away, as if she would fain have spoken, and called him to her side again. But he did not observe, he did not even look once her way ; his face contracted with an expression of intense pain, of care, and of bitter anxiety, as he turned quickly and left the room.

Faustine threw up her head then, and turned to the new-comer.

"Monsieur, you honor our little 'reunions' with a visit ? I am happy to see you. Monsieur Regnaud, will you present M. Duplat to my grandfather ? He receives his friends in the corner there."

"I am honored by the introduction," said Duplat in a low tone ; "but first, Mademoiselle Faustine, allow me to express to you how enchanted I am to be permitted to present myself here, and how long I have craved the pleasure of the acquaintance I now make."

She bowed slightly, and looked away with restless impatience.

"Will you conduct M. Duplat to my grandfather ?" she repeated. "He is there."

And she motioned them away from the circle round her sofa before they could speak again. The two men bowed, and, at her bidding, withdrew.

Piers approached her, and passing Raoul Regnaud's seat, took the corner by the arm of her sofa, where, a moment ago, Victor had stood.

"Victor is gone ?" he said.

"Yes," she answered in English, "he is gone. Ah, *mon Dieu* ! what shall I do with him ? He is obstinate, fixed in his own ways as ever. What shall I do ?"

She spoke in the friendly, confidential tone in which she always addressed Piers, and her face became less bitter and hard.

"Why has he gone?" Piers repeated. "I have seen almost nothing of him for days."

"Nor I," she replied. "He is going his own way, trying to stem an overwhelming current, striving to stop a hopeless breach, wasting his time on all this, pouring his strength out, throwing himself away; and in vain. Ah, it is hopeless!"

"What is the matter now?" he asked.

"I cannot tell you," she exclaimed impatiently. "See, here they come again!—I cannot tell you now. Ah, he was right!" she murmured to herself as Raoul and Duplat approached her again.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MOONSHINE.

PERHAPS Victor's words lingered still, with warning and disapproval, in Faustine's mind; for after the first few moments of discussion, during which her brilliant and suggestive remarks had fired each train of ideas, her powers seemed to flag and to fail her, her head drooped, in her favorite position when silent, upon her hand, and she leaned back on her sofa, looking from one to the other of the eager faces with an expression curiously dissatisfied and perplexed.

Piers watched her, often surprised at the expression on her face; for the two men spoke now, as they discussed, with such rapidity and excitement, that he ceased to understand them, and did not realize the meaning of those sentiments whose utterance brought the color into Faustine's cheek.

"Are you tired?" he said at last, bending down and speaking in a low voice in English, while the other men were still occupied in noisy vociferation—"are you tired?"

"I believe I am," she answered. "What is it? Is the salon very hot to-night? It is full, certainly, and, *ciel!* they do make so much noise."

She rose suddenly, and passed through the circle of the debaters; and as Raoul ceased his harangue, and turned to follow her, she signed to him to stay.

"No, no; continue," she exclaimed. "Finish your discussion; it is important. Convince M. Duplat, Raoul, for me. I will return ere long. Come," she said to Piers again.

Regnau continued his debate. Piers crossed the room as Faustine had done, and followed her in happy obedience, as she walked to the low-sashed window and threw it open with an impatient hand. It gave on to a little wooden balcony, and opened close to the ground: she stepped out.

"I believe I am tired," she said wearily, as Piers followed her still, and leaned on the wooden balustrade by her side. "This is soothing—this is refreshing; this does one good."

Her voice sank into a murmur; she leaned low over the balcony, and gazed down into the green foliage that grew rich and luxurious over their porch-door, climbing over the window, and curling round the wooden balustrade.

Piers leaned by her, and looked at her. He felt dazzled and bewildered by her unwonted gentleness to him to-night—such a contrast as it was, to the bitter irony and distant politeness of her manner towards Duplat and Raoul. He felt wonderfully happy, and his heart beat, full of something he thought the time was ripe for him to say—and yet it seemed hard to say it. He trembled, hesitating on the brink.

"Yes," she exclaimed again, before he had made up his mind to anything, "I am tired of all that—

that," she continued, turning and pointing into the brightly lit room, where the different groups of figures were clear and visible to them, as they stood on the darkened balcony without. "I am tired of that. Look !"

"Tired of it?" repeated Piers ; for at that moment this seemed to him, of all sentiments, the one he most wished to hear her express. "Will you tell me what you mean? Are you tired of Paris—of your mission here—of your associates, your friends? Can it be—can it be that you would leave them all?"

"Leave them!" she said bitterly ; "there is no leaving Fate in this world. It pursues, it follows us."

"But Fate! there may be other Fates ; there is choice left to us surely. We may turn from one path to another in this life of ours. Fate may seem to open as a vista before us, but need it always be followed?"

"Fate is everything," she answered. "We are but struggling atoms in the great ocean of Fate. The strong waves dash us hither and thither ; the restless tides rush onwards in the deep heart-currents of our lives ; we cannot resist it."

"But may you not be mistaken?" he persisted. "There are other destinies, other works as worthy to be done ; and you say you are tired of this."

"I am tired of the disputes and failures ; I am tired of the cowardice and delay ; I am weary because—well, you cannot understand it all. Why do you ask me? What do you know of my inner life? Why are *you* here among us, wasting your life, for it is waste for you? What keeps *you* here, I say again and again, in the midst of the restless struggles of unrestful France?"

"Cannot you conceive what keeps me?" he exclaimed suddenly, bending low over the balcony to hide his face ; "cannot you imagine?"

"I?" she answered impatiently. "You foolish English boy, what can I know? Surely I have enough to fill my mind and heart in France and her future

without turning to puzzle over the thoughts and intentions of men of other lands. Why *you* do not return to your own cold, conventional country, and your own cold-blooded people, I am sure I cannot tell."

"But I can!" exclaimed Piers passionately. "Let me tell you: listen," he persisted, laying his hand suddenly on hers as it rested near him on the balustrade. "Listen—let me tell you: hear me a little of my own future, my hopes, my life."

"Speak," she answered in suddenly softened tone. "What would you say to me?—speak."

She looked at him with quiet surprise. There was nothing of what she was wont to call the cold-hearted English indifference in him, as he stood up and turned full upon her now. He had her hand firmly between his own, and he continued in rapid, impetuous tones.

"Hear me; Faustine, our goddess, our inspirer; hear me. You know how I came here with Victor to become a Universalist—a servant of humanity, a champion of the Peace-bond, an adherent of the world-wide uniting Faith. And, Faustine, you know how it has been. They will not have me; they do not want my services; there is nothing for me to do among them after all my aspirations and all my hopes. Everything is trouble and confusion: no one seems to know what is right to do."

"True," she said, "true."

She stood straight before him as he spoke, and looked up with some surprise into his agitated face, and let her hand remain quietly in the clasp of his.

"And I would have gone away back to my own country, convinced once more that there was no career, noble and sublime, in which there was any place for me, but for *you*, Faustine."

"But for me? Have I indeed had power to keep alive enthusiasm," she exclaimed with a little sarcastic laugh, "in one of the cold hearts of your chill clime? Ha! has my inspiration, of which they talk, had such

a power over you ? Over all—over all but him !” she murmured to herself.

“ Yes, yes. When I am with you, Faustine, I still feel hopeful—earnest ; I still have power, I still aspire ; I still think I may one day do something worth the doing—something sublime and great. And, Faustine——”

“ Bah !” she interrupted him. “ What is there for you to do ? What is there you could do in our affairs ?—you, an Englishman ; you, of that hard, cold country of people who care but for their own well-being, who seek but their own tranquillity and opulence and peace. You do not care for us, I tell you ; you have no sympathy with our struggles ; you can never understand.”

“ I care, Faustine—I care only for you. I wish for nothing but to serve your Cause. I desire no higher fate than to die—yes, die, if need be, in your service and at your will.”

“ You care ! Foolish boy,” she answered, “ what are you saying ? You die !—you shed English blood in the Cause of the freedom of France ! You understand me !—what do you mean ?”

“ I mean, Faustine,” he went on again, bending over the balcony, and plucking a spray of jasmine that flowered below them, and glistened in the silver light —“ I mean that I love you ; that Causes and politics and all things are nothing to me in comparison with you. I love you ; and I would take you from all these scenes that wear and tire you—I would take you to my English home, make you there my queen, its ruler, the arbitrator and inspirer of my life.”

“ Your life !” she answered, and laughed bitterly again. “ And you think you understand me and know my heart, and yet tell me this ?”

“ Faustine, hear me.”

“ No, I will not hear you ; but I will speak. Look here,” she said, and she took the sprig of jasmine, as she spoke, half unconsciously from his hand, “ you *know nothing of me*, you English boy, or of any of

us. You know nothing of what is in my character, or in my heart, or in my future, or you would never have come to me with such words, you would never have let such dreams take form. To speak to me of love—of the tranquil love of an English home—the idea is wild. To speak to me of leaving my career, my people, my Paris, is still wilder ; and to think that I have a single thought of love to give in response to—any one ; or that I could swerve for a moment from the aim I have set myself—from the service of that life to which my heart has vowed its powers, or cease my efforts, or stay my striving, until that life is crowned with triumph and success that I shall have won for it,—mind you, that I shall have won,—to think such thoughts as this is to show that you know little of Faustine Dax indeed.”

“I do not understand you,” he answered sadly.

“Of course you do not ; how should you?—who does ? *He* does not ; no one does. I scarcely understand the contradictions of myself. But you—I understand you. Do not mourn : do not look sad and disconsolate, when I tell you that to think of love from me is an idle dream. You will thank me some day, when you wander back to your own estimable conventionality, and establish with a fair, fitting bride the British domestic happiness you think now you would have me to share.”

“Why do you mock me, Faustine ? Why do you deride England ? We wish France well.”

“Yes ; and in complacent well-wishing you would look on and see France torn to pieces, if it so befell her ; see her struggle, and bleed, and die ! Go !—I know your England. But,” she continued, changing her tone suddenly, “why should I visit my views of your self-centred country upon you. *You* are sincere, I know you are ; you think you are ready to lay down your life at this moment for France, for her freedom, for her glory, at the bidding of Faustine, and you say *I mock* when I tell you that the day may come when

France, in her struggles, will be bleeding and tearful—I, in the midst of the bloodshed and the toil, and you, thanking Heaven you are an Englishman and in peace, will stand by with indifference, complacent and sublime. Ah! I know your country.”

“So do I,” responded Piers, “and you do us little justice; but, if I acknowledge that we *are* self-centred, practical, material perhaps, wanting in ideality, what more can I say, Faustine, save that if I did *not* feel it, and if I did not aspire to be different, would I be pleading now with you?—would I be here? Make me otherwise: take my life—mould it as you will.”

“Shall I take it?” she said, laughing lightly. “Will you be my friend? I believe in English friendships; yes, indeed I do. Will you unite your life with these wild lives that group around my Cause? Will you cast in your fate with the stormy future that is theirs—is mine?”

“I will—I will!” he cried.

She looked up into the face bending towards her in the moonlight, and smiled tenderly, almost pityingly, as she saw the glow of eager enthusiasm that lit its dark shades.

“I believe you would,” she said, gently. “Yes, *you* are noble and true; yes, you have enthusiasm, English though you be. You would be a strong help; you would be a pleasant confidence on my side,—near me always as my friend. But no, ah! no; it is not for you. I remember who brought you here: I remember who would hold me responsible for the snares into which, through me, you might fall. I know the dangers; I know the terrors to come. Go, go: I will not take your life; I will not confuse your sense of truth and honor, as theirs there in the room behind us is dazzled and confused. No, no, you must never be one of us! You are Victor’s friend.”

“And if his, may I not be yours also?” he urged.

“Friend, yes, yes; mine, mine,—Faustine’s friend, *as she is*—here sometimes, alone with her grandfather,

alone with Victor, with you, with all the associations of the sweet old life. But friend of my Cause, mingling with the fire and the fury of life that describes Faustine Dax of the revolutionists of Paris,—no, no, you are Victor's friend : I will not have you ; it is not for you. Will you not go back to your England ?" she continued, impetuously : "it is better for you. Why stay here longer ?—why do you not go ?"

"I cannot go, I will not go," he answered, "as long as you will let me come here,—as long as you will call me—friend. Let me come, let me see you, let me hear your voice, let me join in the enthusiasm, if not in the activity, of your Cause ; let me come still, and be always your friend."

"Good. Come then, if you will, while Victor lets you. I like your friendship. I hate your English coldness ; I hate your country,—I hate its spirit, I hate its people ; but there's something I like in you."

"I may come, then ?"

"Yes, if you like it ; come,—when you please."

"And," he continued passionately, "if I come, may I not hope that *time*, Faustine, may change your feelings (as perhaps you weary still more), may I not love still, and love in hope ?"

"If you come," she answered, with a sudden cloud gathering on her brow again—"if you come, you must never speak that word again. Of every one of them, I tell you, you are the first who has ever dared. Once is enough, remember: speak it not again. Love, love ! it is the word I cannot bear to hear ; it is the one sentiment I hold in abhorrence and in contempt. It is the power by which the whole world is disorganized, I tell you, the one power that seems to subjugate everything we call strength. By it men are slaves to weak, foolish women ; by it women forget to be heroic and strong. I hate love : never speak of love to me."

And with this he was dismissed, or at least silenced.

They both turned to gaze for a moment into the cool, still, moonlight air, and the night breezes blowing on

Faustine's forehead and on Piers's flushed and agitated face had tranquillized both, before Raoul Regnau's voice behind them interrupted their silence, and they had to turn to receive the farewells of the dispersing guests within the room.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NOTES OF ANOTHER STRAIN.

THIS evening was the climax of that particular phase in the history of this portion of Piers's life.

The repulse of first love! It was very bitter, and he felt it was quite hopeless as well—she would *never* love him! She could not love; or—at all events—her love was not for him.

He suffered very bitterly and very much for some time, but he rallied again! The wound had not penetrated to the heart-strings. He *could* be her friend, and find pleasure in their friendship, and as such he soon resumed his daily visits to the Place St. Etienne.

They established a "Platonic friendship," as they called it, and *all* meant Faustine still! She did a great deal for him; she awoke in his being the dormant sensibilities to the beautiful, the artistic, the picturesque; she gave his character a poetry it never lost again.

It was after a long period of this dramatic existence that Piers sauntered home late one evening from the Place St. Etienne to his hotel at the end of the Rue Rivoli. He was alone.

He sat down and covered his face with his hands for a moment, in that intensity of feeling to which they had all excited each other, and the vision of that abstract intangible ideal seemed to sway his spirit and overwhelm it.

He sat thus silent for a long time, and then sud-

denly he raised his head, and on the table before him he saw—an unopened letter. It was addressed to himself: it had been sent *poste restante*, and no doubt Victor, in fetching his own letters, had found it lying for Piers in the post-office, and had brought it here.

He took it up, and at a glance recognized the handwriting. It was that of Frederick Thellusson. It brought back instantly a stream of old memories and a rush of association—Cambridge, England, home. He opened it, and at the first line his face became grave and earnest.

“MY DEAR ASHTON,” wrote Frederick—“In the recollection of my life at Cambridge, now becoming to me a distant and pleasant memory, the figures that stand out in strongest relief against the general crowd of my associates there, are—yours, and that of Victor Lescar. You have passed away from the scene of my life, both of you, and at this hour I do not know even where you are. What are you doing? To what work have you turned those powers, so living and vigorous, those intellects of yours, so rich and strong?

“If this ever reaches you, let me have an answer; let me hear what you are both *doing* in the world.

“As for me, life has met me on the very threshold of the University. I have never had a moment’s hesitation as to the course I was destined to pursue; I have never looked backwards, or from side to side; I have plunged into my work with heart and mind, and it satisfies and absorbs me. You know enough of my old tendencies to conceive the sort of career which I would adopt as mine.

“My life I can quickly lay before you. One of those events we are prone to call accident led me, just as I was leaving the University, to visit those unknown regions from which I now date my letter, St. Bethel-in-the-Fields, and that accident has decided my *life*.

“I have become what people call ‘a philanthro-

pist,'—a word that bears many meanings, a name that has been used to describe many and very different men.

"Practically described, my life is passed in a physical and spiritual ministry, in occupations that combine the political economist with the visiting clergyman and the inspector of the Bureau de la Bien-faisance. All these posts I found vacant; all these requirements I found here.

"I find that, to be really useful in the career which I have chosen, a man must pass through a period of passionate enthusiasm of sympathy, and reach a condition when all his coolly critical and analytical faculties can be fully exercised; when cases and circumstances in all their infinite varieties can be tested and duly weighed, conditions traced to cause, action to influence.

"The life that passes before me daily, constitutes a practical and experimental illustration and test of many of those opposing doctrines and theories we used to propound to each other in the Conseil de Douze at Cambridge. We discussed the conditions of social life then in all its depth and range. I see it enacted before me now.

"Pauperism *is* increasing in our great capital with a rapidity I could not have credited, had I not come to live down here and watched its operations for myself. We want men of intellect and power to cast themselves into the consideration of this subject. It is urgent. Here—I see results in their full development—the pauper. Many degrees away I see the causes—the source from which the pauper drifts,—the man who must become one as the inevitable ultimate of his life; and I want help for him. I want young power, vigorous, active, and thoughtful, and possessed of influence, to take up the chain of action at that point of social existence which I could indicate as the prolific source that feeds the pauper-stream.

"I have come to see, in the course of practical efforts towards a realization of my ideal dream of a

Christian crusader's life, that philanthropy is less an abstract career of sentiment and sensibility than it is of energetic action and economic thought—less the work of private devotion and beneficent charity than of political organization.

"I want to see the condition of the pauper, and the cause that produces him, made a question of first importance as a national and, so to speak, a *secular* thing. It closely concerns us all.

"We expect to receive, Sunday after Sunday, from the minister in the pulpit some fresh thought, some new inspiration, some ray of spiritual light, such as *he* can receive only in the pure peace of spiritual contemplation—in that holy quiescence which alone feeds and enriches the mind with celestial truth. And he comes to us Sunday after Sunday, and in his life between, there lies a week of labor, heavy and heart-rending,—labor that wears the brain, depresses the spirit, and blights the imagination,—labor that draws every fibre of the frame into sensitive sympathetic exercise,—labor which it seems impossible to reconcile with a strain on the intellectual powers.

"The whole burden lies on them ; the physical burden of responsibility, the spiritual burden of their mission to our souls. It seems all wrong to me : they are doing our duty as well as their own—thinking out secular national thoughts we should be thinking instead of them, organizing schemes of reform we should see completed before them on their way. We leave philanthropy to our clergymen ; and a question for us all, and chiefly for us young ones who would be politicians, it ought to be.

"We want the crowd of frivolous men made more earnest, more obedient to their higher impulses, more faithful to their better selves ; and we want earnest men to be more practical, less visionary, less individual and self-concentrated, and so more productive, in the '*excelsiors*' of their lives. We want above all *young men*—given to the work, volunteers, ready, educated

and devoted, to fill the ranks as they thin, to breast the broad front of the national difficulties as they advance all around us in our land.

"And that brings me, my two dear friends, to my first question again. What are you two doing? How has all this shaped itself to your minds? What course lies before each of you in the intentions of life? I know the rich store of strength in both: in what contest are you putting it forth? Let me hear from you. Let me have a lengthened expression of your views, in evidence that you forgive and appreciate the length of the homily, by which I have tried to make you acquainted with mine. Once more,—what are you doing? Yours faithfully, dear Ashton,

"FREDERICK THELLUSSON."

What answer could Piers make just then to such a letter? What was he doing? What responsive picture could he draw to this description of a life engrossed in eager effort, spent in untiring devotion, active and practical, to the causes they had all called theirs?

Such men as Frederick Thellusson, who were contented to pass their lives amid surroundings unbeauteous and uninspiring, must be incapable of the enthusiasm that would echo the language of Faustine. Such as he were ignorant of the fascination of the ideal. Surely the heroism that glowed in their hearts as they sang their patriotic songs to Faustine's accompaniment at the Place St. Etienne must be a far higher form of spiritual liberty, and more sublime, than anything that Thellusson could conceive.

Piers was young yet: the age of passionate sensibility was not over for him. Beauty had but lately asserted its potent sway, awakening his dormant nature to full consciousness of itself. His heart, though very earnest and deep, was after all a young heart; and he was chained to the ideal at that moment with a power for which he knew no name.

So he took up his pen after some consideration, and wrote to Thellusson.

"I cannot tell you," he said, "what a pleasure it is to me to receive your letter. Time, truly, has drifted us apart. You have found your course in life: you are following it in all its nobility and devotion. You ask me concerning mine.

"When I look back on my life, towards the early training of my boyhood, I know now how exceptional it was in circumstance, how preparatory in its nature for the post in life I seem destined to fill. I have no doubt it is the same with you. Your mind always pointed to the direction in which it now leads you; your whole tastes and character foreshadowed the high mission to which you are called.

"For myself, however, I know I am writing to one who will understand me when I say—that that mission you have adopted, and which you describe, does not embrace the picture of *my* life's destiny as it appears to me. How can I describe to you myself?

"I suppose it is a characteristic of our age that we, the youth and strength of the generation, are long restless and seeking, and not easily content. I think this is an embryonic age; surely everything suggests it: an indefinable spirit pervades everywhere; a life strong but intangible agitates through all. Surely it is so in everything.

"Take the poetry of the age, who can understand it? It is sympathetic to us, but untranslatable even to ourselves. Take the controversies of the age; they touch theories on subjects political, social, and religious, that suggest thoughts elevating and inspiring, but difficult to repeat or understand. Take the art of the age; all points to the mystic, the embryonic, the occult, in one word—the ideal.

"This is the spirit, surely, of our times. It is a soaring, soul-elevating tendency within us that cannot be changed and *degraded*, I would almost express it, to sublunary and merely practical things. I think we *must wait* and hearken to the voice, till we can understand which way it leads. The ideal, the new

thought, the new excelsior, 'the banner with the strange device,' it floats above all our heads; and in politics, in life, and in religion we must let it lead us on.

"I cannot think that all this current of mind towards the sublime and idealistic can be an unfortunate element in the mental history of our age. Men are too prone to material satisfaction as regards themselves and their efforts for others. It is not enough surely to feed the populace, to clothe them, to educate them, even in the rougher accomplishments of life. We want national sympathies raised to appreciation of higher things, of which—'LIBERTY INDIVIDUAL' and—'UNITY UNIVERSAL' would be first and chief.

"I cannot at all tell you, my dear friend, in what direction my life's efforts will ultimately turn. At present I am content to contemplate and learn, and to leave the moulding of my destiny to circumstances as they come.

"Meanwhile, it is really a pleasure to hear of old friends and associates; so pray accept my warm thanks for your letter, and let me hear again. In conclusion, you know my uncle—guardian, rather—Sir John Graeme; do you ever see him in London? He is evidently angry with me, for he has not written to me for long. Tell me, if you can, something of him; and believe me ever faithfully yours,

"PIERS ANNERLEY ASHTON."

CHAPTER XXV.

NEW VISTAS.

WHEN Piers had finished his letter, he despatched it with some sense of having achieved a success.

Frederick had sent him his views—old-world views and old-day doings. He would now have some

notion, in contrast, of the sublime and ethereal nature and expectations of his.

He had just despatched his letter when Victor came in. They still occupied the same sitting-room in the Hôtel Barreilles ; and Victor had turned before going on upstairs, as the porter had told him M. Ashton was there, and had even at this late hour just despatched a letter to the post.

Victor entered. He looked grave and weary : the continuous months of feverish effort and excited controversy were telling upon him.

He came in often as now, depressed, anxious, and weary. Piers gave him Frederick's letter.

"Ah !" he said gently, and he sat down and swept back the fair waves of hair that fell heavily over his forehead. "Ah, Frederick Thellusson ! How pleasant to see his handwriting again !"

"Ah !" said Victor again, when he had finished it, looking up as he spoke with a wistful light in his eyes towards Piers, who sat dreamily, while he was reading, in a large chair opposite him, on the other side of the hearth. "Frederick is a happy man : he has found a way in the wilderness, Piers."

"I do not think he has found anything new, has he ?" said Piers. "He seems to me to be following simply in old accepted tracks."

"No ; he has done more than that. He is *at work* ; he has found a key to the labyrinth, and he has only to go steadily on. It is a happy thing to be an Englishman—there is no doubt of it. You can see something, at all events, which may be done. Work, such as Frederick's, will have eternal results."

"And ours, Victor ?"

"Yes, yes ; ours is eternal in its desires also," he answered, "if we could only begin. But there is such a confusion, such opposition of opinion ; it is a hard fight to get a ground from which to start. I envy Frederick ; yes, undoubtedly I do."

"I do not," said Piers, dreamily.

But then, for him and for Victor, just at that time, life wore a different hue !

Since the disagreement between Victor and Faustine on the subject of Duplat, he had gone less than before to the Place St. Étienne, feeling how little sympathy Faustine had with his real efforts and aims. But still there had been a reconciliation, and their feelings of personal friendship were as warm as before; and it was just the morning after the arrival of Thelsson's letter that both the young men, before they left the hotel, received a note from her.

"DEAR FRIEND,"—she wrote in French to Victor,—"In case I should not see you till nearly the evening, write to say that Madame Carlo d'Alnigni has arrived in Paris, returned from her Russian tour, and she sends me a little letter to ask if we will dine with her to-morrow—I and the grandfather; and she adds—you, if I can find you. She hears you are in town, crowned with English honors, as she says; to which she, by her admiration, wishes to add a humble olive-leaf. She also says that Madame Prioleau is with her; she found her somewhere in her travels, and persuaded her to come on here—so we shall meet *her* again, which will be pleasant; and, finally, Madame Carlo adds that Raoul Regnau has informed her that you have brought a young English friend over with you, and she is eager to be introduced to him. She adores the English, she says, which I never knew before. However, M. Piers must do as he likes about acceptance. At all events you, *cher*, must not disappoint our old friend. I enclose her card for both. Let me see you early to-day, if possible. Raoul has already paid me one visit, and I extracted a latent intention from his scheming brain. He has a mission, a journey in prospect, and one, that if Paris can spare you, I would rather see, *cher* Victor, performed by you.

"À toi,

"FAUSTINE."

"That is famous!" exclaimed Victor, as they sat together at the table of the restaurant at their hotel door over their breakfast, and as he read Faustine's note, and tossed over the card to Piers—"that is famous. Madame d'Alnigni is returned, and Madame Prioleau with her. I shall be pleased to see the first for old friendship's sake, and I should go any distance within the range of possibility to hear Madame Prioleau's voice again."

"Who are they?" asked Piers, with shy dissatisfaction, as he held between his fingers the smart, gold-embazoned invitation card.

"Madame Carlo," said Victor, "is an old St. Mar-teau friend. She lived, when I was a little fellow, in a pretty villa beyond my mother's garden; and she and my people were all devotedly attached. She was very kind to me in those days, and ever since; and through us she took a desperate fancy, years ago, to Faustine. She beguiled her away with her once to travel in Italy; and if Faustine had been tractable and submissive, Madame Carlo's house would have been her second home. But they differed. Faustine left her, and they have been, happily, better friends ever since. She has a little apartment in the Place Vendôme, and, whenever she turns up in Paris, she sends for Faustine and me; and we always go. Faustine is really devoted to her, and I have the kindest feeling for the old lady as my mother's valued friend. So we must all accept. Let me see: to-morrow the Frères Piccolo meet; but that is not till twelve P. M. Yes, I can dine with the dear old madame, and go on there in time."

"And, Madame Prioleau?"

"Ah, she is less easily described! *What* she is, you must judge for yourself in every way. *What* she *does*, or has done, rather, I can tell you. She is American—a Southerner; she was the leader of the *band of lady-nurses* who went out on the fields of the *great American* contests to nurse the soldiers of the

army of the South. She learned her profession there ; and in Italy, in Sleswig, in Austria, at home and abroad, she has been practicing it ever since. She is one in a thousand, is Madame Prioleau."

He spoke with the tender enthusiasm with which Piers might perhaps at that time have spoken of Faustine. There was an intense admiration and almost reverence in his tone.

Piers glanced curiously at him. Something he had learned lately, within his own heart, prompted his next words, the question springing from a fancy half conceived.

"Is she married?" he said.

(Could *she* have been Victor's shield from the dark eyes of Faustine?)

"I do not know," was Victor's answer, in a careless voice. "Perhaps she is a widow; but somehow," he added, laughing, "she is not a person you connect naturally with the matrimonial idea. You do not think of wondering about her being married in any past, present, or future when you are talking to her; you think of quite different things. But—you shall see her."

"I do not half like to go," said Piers remonstrating. "You know I hate new sorts of people, Vic."

"No, you do not: you have had no end of new people to know lately, and you have not hated them a bit. At all events, you will not hate Madame Prioleau, I'll answer for it, or old Madame d'Alnigni either. Oh yes, you will go. I will send a line to Faustine."



CHAPTER XXVI.

EN PETIT COMITÉE.

FAUSTINE's persuasions, combined with Victor's, overcame Piers's shyness and disinclination for more new acquaintances, and six o'clock the next evening found the two friends standing together under the archway of the Conciergerie of No. — Place Vendôme.

The curious circle of Parisian society in which the circumstances of his friendship with Victor, and his sympathy with his political views, had conducted Piers, left him at the end of several months' sojourn in Paris still quite in ignorance of society in the ordinary acceptation of the term, or of the inner and private life of any Parisian families of position or rank. The Place St. Etienne had constituted his world.

Madame d'Alnigni—a French woman and the widow of an Italian noble of some distinction,—belonged to this higher and more conventional circle of society into which Piers had never sought to penetrate. Her fancy for her two young *protégés* of the Grand St. Marteau had been an instance of a vein in her character for which she was distinguished among her aristocratic friends.

Madame Carlo d'Alnigni's pretty little apartment was on the second floor in a large mansion at the left-hand corner of the Place Vendôme. There was a government office on the *rez-dechausée*, and in consequence a tall and imposing gendarme stood immovable at each side the archway, and constituted the pride of Madame d'Alnigni's life.

Up the broad stone staircase Victor preceded Piers, *beyond* the first floor to the second, where the door *was held open* in waiting for them, and they passed *into the pretty little octagon hall.*

It was a beautiful little hall. A rich Indian carpet covered the middle of the floor, a parquet of colored wood showing round each side. A soft globe-lamp hung in the arched centre of the ceiling, and rich velvet curtains covered the entrance of each door.

"Par ici, messieurs," said the servant; and he raised one of the curtains, and softly opened a door—"par ici."

They followed him, first through an ante-room, and then into one of those charming little apartments, of which the first glance reveals the taste and understanding of its inhabitants.

"Mon cher Victor!"

Two ladies sat, one on each side of the fire, and with this exclamation the elder rose, and clasped Victor's extended hands in her own.

She was a handsome, striking old lady, with snowy curls, *frisées* and *coiffées*, clustering round her smooth temples. She had dark sparkling eyes, well-formed and decisive features, a kind glance, and a brilliant smile.

"Ah, you have come—I am so glad. And this is your friend!"

"Yes, madame," said Victor, when he had bent over her little jewelled hands and raised them to his lips—"yes: permit me to introduce him. Mr. Ashton—Madame La Comtesse d'Alnigni."

Piers imitated the deferential salutation of a well-bred Frenchman, with which he was growing familiar, and bowed solemnly and low; and Madame d'Alnigni made him a profound courtesy in answer. Then she looked up and smiled, her eyes sparkling merrily, and she held out her hand.

"How do you do?" she said in very broken English. "That is the way, is it not? I am glad you to be known to me. How do you do?"

And Piers had to take the pretty old hand and kiss it, *as Victor had done*.

"He is getting on," said Victor laughing, as Pier

raised his head again with the color spreading over his handsome face.

"And Madame Prioleau! Ah! we meet once more: how pleasant!"

And Victor turned from Madame d'Alnigni and Piers to the second lady, who sat still by the fire.

Piers's eyes followed him, and his interest was immediately aroused. It was such a refined and charming face, that looked up to answer Victor's greeting, and lit up with the intense sweetness of a smile, on a countenance where smiles may be rare.

It was a pale face, once evidently handsome, but now somewhat worn. It was a sensitive, tender face, with a wonderful look in it of full self-possession and courageous calm. There was a sort of satisfying completeness in the whole countenance, from the sweet look in the dark-grey eyes to the firm kindness of the mouth; there was a harmony on which the eyes rested with a sense of repose and contentment it was difficult to define.

She extended to Victor a hand in which there was as much character and expression as in her face—a hand that could be firm and courageous, that could touch with the infinite gentleness that belongs to strength.

"Madame Prioleau!" Victor held her hand a moment, and looked into her face with an earnestness in his smile, that spoke a past with its memories lying between them.

But she was much older than Victor; that Piers saw at a glance. There was no romance or sentiment in their friendship, it was evident. Her eyes rested on his fair young face with a glance kind and motherly, full of questioning, full of concern; and he looked down at her with that grave look in his eyes that mingled so often with the sweet smile on his lips. A gaze of assurance, reverent and expressive, it seemed to lay his life, his spirit, his career before her, and to

ask her approval, to invite unflinchingly her most critical gaze.

"Dear young friend!" she said, as his hand still held hers. "Ah me! how time flies! I left a curly-locked schoolboy: I come back to find him moustached, six feet high, and a distinguished man."

"Not that yet, madame. But we try and hope."

"Yes, already," she answered. "I have heard of you far and near—the French Wrangler of the year '66. We have all been proud of you, who had anything to do with your education in old days; have we not, madame?" she continued again, smiling as she turned to her hostess.

"Very, very!" exclaimed old Madame d'Alnigni—"very proud; and your friend, too," she continued, looking admiringly at Piers's broad-shouldered English figure. "Do let me present you. Monsieur Ashton—Madame Prioleau."

And Piers bowed again as the pale kind face was raised towards him with a look of scrutiny in the grey eyes.

"Where is Faustine?" cried Madame d'Alnigni.

And just then the door was opened again, the curtain thrown back, and Faustine swept into the room.

Madame d'Alnigni rushed at her, and clasped her with fervor in her arms.

"*Ma belle! ma bien aimée!*" she exclaimed, as she kissed Faustine's blooming cheek. "You are more lovely than ever, my treasure; is she not, Madame Prioleau, is she not?"

Faustine laughed, and disengaged herself from the old lady's embrace, and exchanged a warm greeting with Madame Prioleau.

"Do you not find her beautiful?" said Madame d'Alnigni again, turning impetuously to Piers.

He colored suddenly and smiled.

"Who could find her otherwise?" he answered; and Faustine turned to the old lady with impatient vexation.

"Dear madame," she said, "do not talk nonsense, and entrap unsuspecting Englishmen into belying their nationality. An Englishman never flatters."

"I do not flatter now," said Piers. "If I am asked a question, Mademoiselle Faustine, I must answer with truth."

"Good, good," said the old lady. "And it is true, Faustine, *ma chère*; you are more than ever like a damask rose."

"Bah!" said Faustine. "Dear friend, you see with the coloring of your own kind eyes."

"No, no. Ah, here is M. Regnau. Come, we will ask him," she exclaimed again as the door was opened, and M. Raoul Regnau was announced. But Faustine turned now and silenced the old lady with a grave appealing glance; and her answer to Raoul Regnau's greeting was cold and imperious enough to show even Madame d'Alnigni that such badinage would be out of place, now he had appeared on the scene.

Raoul Regnau was well dressed, well scented, well curled, as usual, with his diamond ring flashing on his finger, as he raised his hand continually to his black moustache. Somehow that ring, the white taper fingers, the jet-black curling hair, and the row of shining white teeth between his red lips were always points of strong contrast that caught the attention whenever Raoul Regnau was seen; and these dwelt in the memory, in the sense of the impression he made.

The little dining-room appeared beyond the purple *portière*, as they raised and held it back; a beautiful little circular apartment, from whence the light came in soft glistening radiance, streaming into the shadowy fire-glow and twilight in which Madame d'Alnigni chose to receive her guests.

Piers was elected to conduct the old lady, as the stranger of the evening. Victor was made happy by the command to take in Madame Prioleau, his beloved friend; and Raoul and Faustine fell to each other.

It was a charming little dinner. Old Madame

d'Alnigni knew how to entertain her friends. The dining-room, just bright enough for cheerfulness, with lights just sufficiently softened to prevent a glare, was a picture in itself ; pannelled with pollard oak, like the vestibule, its sombre tone was again relieved by a few beautiful pictures let into the wall—a Poussin, a Watteau, some Dutch fruit-pieces by Sneider, some sweet little “interiors” by Teniers, and on each side of each picture a tiny statuette held the pendent globes of soft light. The table was covered with fruit and flowers ; the dinner was brought noiselessly round by the black servants and their attendant satellites, and conversation flowed easily in the little circle without any interruption.

“Victor,” said Madame d’Alnigni, “what are you and Madame Prioleau discussing so gravely ? Try a glass of this Veuve Clicquot, madame ; it will do you good. Monsieur Regnaud, what do you think of my Château Lafitte ?”

“Excellent,” said Raoul, raising the purple wine to his lips ; “it does credit, madame, to a lady’s cellar.”

“Your health, *chère madame*,” said Victor, brightly, as he raised his glass in his turn ; “your health, and many a pleasant meeting for us all in the future.”

“*Grazie*, dear child,” she answered, nodding her white curls, and smiling on him with a softer sparkle in her dark eye ; “if we do not meet often it will be your fault, I fancy. I am more likely to be stationary than you are, mon Victor ; your journeys will be wider and longer than mine.”

“Talking of travels,” interrupted Raoul, “I have a word to say to you, Lescar, this evening. With madam’s permission, I refer to it now. Would you like to travel awhile ? The opportunity for some one of us will offer soon.”

Faustine’s eyes glistened eagerly as Raoul looked round at her, and questioned her face as he spoke. One of them were to go, he had said ; which would *she* choose to have sent forth ?—which to remain ?

Her dark eyes met his for a moment, then they wandered to Victor's face.

"You mean," said Victor, becoming grave, the bright smile with which he had greeted old Madame d'Alnigni fading instantly—"you mean the 'mission of visitation,' as Bouchet and Rochecarre put it with so much grandiloquence?"

"Yes," exclaimed Raoul, "the visitation of all the centres of the 'Universal' at home and abroad; an important mission. Who is worthy to go? I, for one, humbly repudiate my fitness; but you——?"

"There is important work to be done in Paris at present," Victor answered, his face clouding more and more. "But," he added, rousing himself, "why should we discuss it now? Pardon us, dear madame. How did the conversation turn on such serious themes? Let us change it. Madame Prioleau, you were telling me of your American campaign."

Madame Prioleau answered him, and they fell into their separate conversation again. Raoul turned to Faustine.

"I go or stay,—as you ordain," he said. "Who is worthy? Both offices are important."

"He is worthy for either!" said Faustine defiantly. "If he goes, well: *we* will guard his interests here."

She uttered the word "*we*" not in confidential accents, suggesting a partisanship between herself and Regnau, but with dauntless defiance, and with the imperious dignity of acknowledged power. That "*we*" was a royal utterance, speaking individual though united force.

Raoul turned away and Piers watched both of them.

With a gaze softened, wistful, and full of a strange anxiety, Faustine's eyes turned now on Victor's smiling face. Such a gaze as, Piers thought to himself, was worth a life or a death to win; and yet he could *never win it*, nor Raoul, nor any of them; it was only *for him*, who, all unconscious, all unresponsive, was

bending his blue eyes and his sunny smiles on Madame Prioleau's grave kindly face.

Piers watched her, and, as he watched, a sort of unconscious wish that was gaining strength within him, came over him, as it had often done of late—a curious wish that he could again see some one else, who, he thought, might look at *him* with eyes as kind as those now turned upon Victor—some one whose earnest spirit had often reflected his, whose glance, not fiery and passionate like Faustine's, but still full of expressive feeling, had often softened with wistful sympathy, brightened with tender joy, as it was raised to him.

This memory and this vague wish came often as he watched Faustine and Victor in these latter days. And yet he did not understand himself, and as little did he interpret the trouble and anxiety of Faustine.

Poor Faustine! She loved—she feared often for him she loved. She feared, as she loved—in silence.

That dinner left many and pleasant memories, returning long afterwards with force, stronger than any impression it made at the time; for it was forgotten just then, in the crowd of events, important to every one of them, that came following closely on that evening.

The necessity of a diplomatic mission to carry the message of the "Universal," from its assumed parent source in the Rue des Gravilliers, to every child of its creation, in whatever corner of the globe, was decided on. The step was resolved upon; the proposition accepted: there remained for some days only the question of—the man?

Whose influence was brought most strongly to bear is uncertain. Whether Raoul Regnau's passionate jealousy decided that his purpose would be best served by Victor Lescar's absence, and his own presence, in Paris and at the Place St. Etienne, it is impossible to say: whether Bouchet found that Victor served his *true aims but indifferently*, and Jules Duplat realized

that he was a foe rather than a friend to his infamous schemes, all remains unknown. Influence works secretly, and with untraceable course, in societies and social conditions such as those of Paris at that date.

But, whatever influence decided the election, Victor was unanimously chosen, entrusted with the mission, and obliged, by the vows of his order, to undertake the journey whether it pleased him or not.

He accepted without hesitation : he was to go.

Then came the gradual realization of the different points at which this change in his future affected the career of his friends.

Faustine scarce knew if she were glad or heart-broken, that he should leave them. She would lose him again—her brother, her friend ; nay, in the hidden secrets of her heart—her love. But he would be safe. She knew the power of bitter jealousy ; she knew the evil tongues that spoke in envy against him in Paris ; she knew the cruel eyes that watched him from every side ; she knew he was above them all in purity of motive, in unselfishness of devotion, in nobility of force ; and she knew they all hated him for this, though all seemed to obey.

So she sent him from her ; and with him went Piers. What else was there for him to do ? Victor was going—his friend and comrade,—going hither and thither over the vast unexplored surface of the world ; of course Piers would go with him, unless, indeed, Faustine had smiled, and softened, and whispered “Stay,”—which she did not.

She would rather Victor was not alone in his journey ; and when Piers had turned to her, she had commanded, “Go.”

So they went, the two friends together, away—wide and distant, wandering far.

And the curtain drops over their life in Paris—as they left it ; and a new act—with many new, fascinating, and bewitching scenes,—began for them, as they

ced the scattered children of the "Universal" among the distant races of the numberless countries of the earth. We will not follow their wanderings; we will not trace step by step the developing education of their minds, under the many new influences that crowded into their lives.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AT PRINCE'S GATE.

LADY CURZON KELLAM had her way at last.

In the winter of 1870 the snow was heavy and the frost hard all over the north of Scotland; and when the time drew near that Sir John Graeme had to leave the Old Towers and return to his official duties in London, the state of the climate operated to assist the influence of Lady Kellam's urgent letters, and resulted in his final decision that his two girls should accompany him.

Lady Kellam helped him, as she always did in family matters of difficult and practical detail; and she discovered for him, and assisted him to procure, one of that short row of beautiful houses in the upper part of Prince's Gate, with the Park lying beneath the front drawing-room windows, and a large, really beautiful garden under the bow-window of Donna's pretty morning-room behind.

And there, by the beginning of February—at which time Parliament opened, and Sir John made his excellent speech—they were all comfortably settled, and Lady Kellam congratulated herself with supreme complacency, that the coming season would present a new excitement for her.

Lady Kellam had had the sole charge (Sir John

had gladly resigned it to her) of all the furnish painting, and hanging department ; and she had e to town, she assured the girls, in the horrid dead t of the year, at the heroic sacrifice of a whole roun country visits, and had spent hours, indeed, w weary days, in choosing and deciding and sup tending the fittings of their Prince's Gate man from the basement to the roof.

I forbear to describe their rooms ; they wer *toto*, a pleasing and well-chosen combinatio color and shade. Panelled frescoes and softly ti walls, Aubusson carpeting, warm and yielding to pressure of the foot. Portières of dusky v separated room from room ; turquoise hangings v the windows ; and in the morning-room, a p flowery cretonne (the same as every one else h that moment), covered the low sofas and loun chairs.

Gaie vowed she had never seen anything so fectly lovely ; and Lady Kellam assured her, smiling complacency, it was not more than father's position required. The only thing to be was, as she added with a toss of her head, "he to have done it long ago."

Donna thought it lovely, too, and with her vated taste she enjoyed, with a keen though half-conscious realization, all this perfection of re beauty with which their father had surrounded in their new London home.

Gaie's sensation, in the midst of so much novelty one of simple, unalloyed enjoyment and expect She seemed transported, in the course of that one way journey, into a fairy palace of beauty an light ; and her life seemed to lie before her in a n cloud-land of infinite and delicious possibilitie which she could give neither form nor name.

It was on that very first afternoon that Lady lam received a little shock, about the sisters— one of them, at least. All the time while sh

contemplating Gaie's fair countenance, Donna was sitting silent on the other side. She sat with her hands resting upon her knees, her slim, delicate fingers joined tightly together, her grey eyes fixed upon the large, glowing fire, and answering back its warm reflection in a thoughtful light from their shaded depths.

Donna was indulging in a very bad habit of hers, that had grown upon her very strongly of late. "In London!" she was thinking; and not for a hurried visit of a few days, as they had sometimes been before, but to sojourn, with time and leisure and opportunity to explore all sorts of delightful and undiscovered lands. London—the centre of national history in all ages of time. London—that embraced Westminster Abbey, the British Museum, the Tower, and St. Paul's. London—where Tyndall and Huxley were lecturing, and women were invited and encouraged to come and listen and learn—where Carlyle was writing, somewhere down in Chelsea.

What fields for exploration! London teemed with interest on every side. At this point Lady Kellam's voice arrested her.

"My dear Donna," she said, "how you do sit brooding!—a shocking habit, my dear—very bad style. Nothing so ill-bred as to let your attention wander; nothing so offensive as to appear absent in the presence of a hostess or a guest. Listen—let me see—there is so much to be done, I scarcely know where to begin."

"Yes, there is such a quantity to be done, Aunt Kellam; it is delightful, but really it *is* difficult to know where to begin."

"Let me see. What shall we do to-morrow?"

"Perhaps if we got a guide-book, aunt, it might help us to lay out a little plan."

"A what, child? A guide-book—why, of course, have the 'Court Guide;' and yes, I dare say you had better have a copy. You will never remember where

anybody lives at first. My dear Donna, do hold yourself up."

Donna was bending in a favorite attitude, undoubtedly open to objection. Her hands were clasped round her knees now, and her eyes wandering away from her aunt's face back towards the fire.

"Look at me, my dear, when I speak to you. Yes, you had better have a 'Court Guide,' though I do not know that the 'Royal Red-Book' is not better. They have certainly ferreted out every corner of London; and really, what with Kensington and Bayswater, and all those new parts, there is no end to the out-of-the-way places people put themselves into these days. Besides, you must have a 'Where is it?' for a visiting address-book; you will soon get into it all; you will soon know every corner of habitable London. I will take care of that. I dislike a want of common sense particularly, and that stupid ignorance girls affect nowadays."

"Ah, but London is so vast," said Donna. "It is dreadful to be so ignorant, but I feel it will take us some time. When shall we begin, aunt? To-morrow? Oh, do let us go to Westminster Abbey first! I do so want to see Edward the Confessor's tomb."

"Westminster! My dear child, what an out-of-the-way idea. Yes, well; you ought to go there, certainly. But, bless me! poor John—your father, I mean—he ought to have let you get through that school-girl sight-seeing years ago."

"Oh, aunt!" said Gaie, "prepare yourself for many shocks of astonishment if you intend to explore all Donna has in that head of hers. It is something dreadful, I assure you."

Lady Kellam looked uneasily across the fireplace at Donna's thoughtful expression; but before she could speak Donna answered her question.

"Oh, of course, if Westminster is not convenient, it does not the least matter. We need not begin with it. It is only one of so many places I want to see."

"My dear Donna, your time will be pretty fully occupied before very long, I assure you."

"Yes, I know it will. It will be quite difficult to do everything; but it will be all so interesting, I know. There is the Tower we must go to, and the British Museum, almost first, because I want to find out about corals, and there are beautiful specimens there; and then there is Kensington, with all the Grecian casts and the Turner pictures; and there is the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square. I do not know that we had not better begin there."

"My dear children!" exclaimed Lady Kellam,aghast; "when in the name of goodness do you expect to find time for such ridiculous explorations as these? Why, my dear, think what you have before you!—the drawing-room in March, a whole lot of early 'at homes' coming on before Easter, and neither you nor your sister have a single gown fit to put on. My dears, you have an immense deal to do."

"I know I have," said Donna. "Then there is Temple Bar, where Wat Tyler——"

"My darling child, what nonsense you are talking!" exclaimed Lady Kellam, with an irritability of tone that contrasted seriously with the caressing epithet. "Why; these are the sort of sights school children and the servants go to see when they have a holiday! I believe you will want to go to Madame Tussaud's and the Polytechnic next!"

"There! What did I tell you?" exclaimed Gaie, laughing. "Oh, aunt! it is hopeless. Donna has been a *Gentianella* (I will not have her called a blue-stocking) for years; and she could tell you astonishing things! Why, she is regularly scientific!"

"Nonsense, Gaie, you do not know how ignorant I am. I know nothing," pleaded Donna.

"You are *cognizant*, as the old Strathallerby school-master used to say, of certain very remarkable facts—that I maintain; but I dare say everybody else knows them, and it is only I who am an *ignoramus*. I won-

der, now, Donna, if Aunt Kellam does know that—what is it?—we are all of us made of electrified atoms?”

“My beloved child!” expostulated Lady Kellam.

“Yes; let me see—I can say some of it in a sort of catechism—molecules. Aunt, we are made of molecules, and Donna knows all about it; but I declare I cannot get any farther. Where does the carbon and oxygen come in? Oh, Donna! I forget it all!”

“You are a helpless pupil, Gaie,” said Donna, laughing.

“Ah, I will ask papa—here he comes!” she exclaimed with delight, as the door opened, and Sir John appeared.

“Ah, Catherine! Ah, my birdies! Here you all are, snug and warm as possible; and it is abominably cold outside. Well, Catherine, are you giving these little awkward fledglings of mine their first lesson in the art of flying with grace?”

“Awkward, papa! Why, I have just made my presentation courtesy with such *exquisite* grace, that Aunt Kellam positively says I have nothing to learn, except—not to tumble backwards on my train.”

Sir John drew a low chair to the fire, sat down, and Gaie turned her back on Aunt Kellam, and came and knelt close by him on the rug. He looked into the saucy face with an amused smile as he patted her cheek.

“Catherine,” he said, “this is an upstart, impertinent monkey; you will have to keep her in great order, and if she gets too obstreperous for you, you must apply to me. I am a terrible martinet.”

“Papa, how can you?” And Gaie’s eyes were opened very wide, and fixed reproachfully upon his face. “Never mind!” she added, nodding mischievously; “Aunt Kellam says I am going to be a great success.”

Sir John burst into a merry laugh.

“Yes, I am sure of it. I do not anticipate any

trouble with Gaie," said Lady Kellam with reserved sprightliness, as she glanced across the fireplace to where Donna sat. "Donna has been treating me to a view of her intentions for the disposal of her time throughout this London season. Shocking, certainly, beyond words; and *time*, that at her age has become so truly important and valuable."

Sir John laughed loud and long with provoking persistency, and Lady Kellam drew herself up at last with some dignity and disgust.

"John!"

"My dear Catherine, I beg your pardon! But let me hear your complaint. Donna is not generally the rebellious bird. It is with Gaie I have always to do the wing-clipping process."

"Papa, you know," said Donna gravely again, "I had so many plans—places I want to see in London, and numbers and numbers of things I want to do—and——"

"Lectures, John—stuff and nonsense about Huxley and Tyndall, she has been talking to me."

"And there are all kinds of places—hospitals and homes and institutions, you know, papa—that would help us so much to understand things at home. And you see, I am afraid, as aunt says, there will not be time for everything."

"There, you hear, John! What is the use, I ask you, of your taking this handsome house, and turning the girls out as they ought to be, if Donna flies off with notions like that? Hopeless, John, hopeless!"

Sir John did not laugh now; he was looking away from Lady Kellam towards the slight, bending figure of his elder daughter—at the smooth, dark, shapely head, and the earnest young face bent towards the fire.

"Donna and drawing-rooms and gowns and flower-shows and ball-rooms!" The combination seemed certainly perplexing to his mind. Yet his eyes were *kind and tender* as he looked at her.

But Donna,—his precious little sage, his young fellow student, his pupil and companion in every subtle perplexity of scientific thought—certainly Lady Kellam, with her working-world notions, seemed strangely incongruous, now he had brought them together, with Donna or anything characteristic of her.

"Aunt Kellam," he said presently to Donna, in a kind but quizzical tone, "Aunt Kellam does not care about the great question of protoplasm—that is very hard, Donna, indeed, upon you and me."

"My dear John——"

"Very hard, Catherine," he went on, "because, you see, we have been and gone and delivered up our lives to you for this season, in a devoted bondage of body and mind, and we have all to do just what you tell us. And I find you are going to run counter to our favorite prejudices and our pet pursuits."

"Well, I merely say," replied Lady Kellam, pluming her much ruffled self, "that if Donna has gone back to the school-room, and means to stay there—well, it is useless *my* talking of taking her out, the two are not compatible."

"They are not," said Sir John. "And you have had a great deal of trouble for us, Aunt Kellam, and we owe you gratitude and obedience in return. So there is no help for it, my Donna. Huxley must work out that problem about the material origin without you or me, my love, if the Duchess of Underland chooses to give a *soirée dansante* on the night he speaks, for we are the bond slaves of Aunt Kellam, and to the Duchess of Underland's you and I must go. Never mind, Catherine, do not be afraid for us, we will all be good children; and, Donna, you and I will console ourselves by looking forward to growing old."

"Then I will come and fetch the girls at half-past two to-morrow. Lunch early, John; in these short days one must get out before three o'clock, and we *can go to Elise* about the dresses for the drawing-room, and to a drum at Lady Alloway's in the dusk of the

afternoon. Good-bye. Ta-ta, Gaie, my precious darling ; this is a lovely rose of yours, John—I congratulate you. And, my dear Donna, good night. Kiss me, my love ; take my advice without delay—and, above everything in earth or heaven, my darling,—*do* avoid being—a bore !”

Lady Curzon Kellam drove away—along the park towards her own house in the regions of Mayfair, and she thought with much complacency, notwithstanding Donna’s strange eccentricities of mind, upon these young *protégées* of hers. Yes, they would do—undoubtedly they would do. Gaie was lovely beyond everything—she would create a *furor*. And Donna—she was very handsome in her own style, looked thoroughly distinguished and high-bred ; she had her own share of charms and attractions, and her contrast to Gaie was perfect to a degree.

Lady Kellam thought all this, in her own way, as she drove along, and then her mind reverted to the future and to the precise course she should pursue. The *partis* of the season—who would they be ?

She had always been popular with young men, and she had two or three, she thought, “ready in her pocket.” Ah ! Gaie was barely eighteen, and the Earl of Harrenleigh’s eldest son just came of age last year. Well, he was to be thought of. Donna was five-and-twenty. Dear ! much more difficult. How stupid of John to keep her mewed up till such an age. Ah ! how lucky it was she, Lady Kellam, had always kept friends with that *dear* eccentric Sir Robert Carre, and he had forty thousand a year, was happily older (a good deal) than Donna, and was, strange to say, a bachelor still. He was called a *mauvais sujet* certainly ; but the world was so ready to be censorious, and unlucky mothers who had laid unsuccessful siege to him and that beautiful Castle Carreleigh, were only too glad to take the poor man’s character away. Ah, well ! it was a serious charge—these two dear girls, poor *Adela’s* daughters ; it would not be *her* fault if they

were not both comfortably settled long before Good-wood that very year.

Then Lady Curzon Kellam, who attended Mr. Pratterly's crowded church every fine Sunday morning of her life, let a little piety into her reflections, and as the carriage stopped at her door, the words were formed on her lips, "But after all, in this life, how uncertain is *everything*! We make our schemes, and time destroys them; just as dear Lady Charlotte Eddingham said to me only to-day, '*L'homme propose, mais Dieu dispose*!'"

So murmured Lady Curzon Kellam, but she did not realize how true it was!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

COUNTER CURRENTS.

THAT evening, when Sir John came up from the dining-room, he found the two girls in close conclave, sitting side by side in two low chairs on the crimson rug.

Donna was holding forth, and Gaie was listening with a sweet gravity in her large blue eyes, with a look of thoughtful interest, that spoke a depth in the sunny nature that had not been sounded by Lady Curzon Kellam.

I do not quite know what point of science or philosophy Donna was treating at that moment, but Gaie answered, just as Sir John entered the room,—

"Oh, Donna, what would I be without you?—just a flippant, useless thing."

Sir John came across the room, and in between them on the rug, before the large blazing fire. He took up the poker, and plunged vigorously at the coals

with a thoughtful look upon his face. He dug away at the fire as if driving at some tiresome perplexity, to which the physical exertion of energy gave relief.

"What are you discoursing upon, Donna?" he said.

"Higher education of women," said Gaie, answering promptly before her sister could speak.

Her father smiled.

"Which means—make an ant of a butterfly, eh, Gaie?"

She shook her head.

"People who are born butterflies must just be content to fly about in the summer sunshine, papa."

"Ants carry the burdens of life, butterflies neglect them," said Donna thoughtfully.

"And yet," said her father, "the sunshine is good, and we could not do without our pretty-winged butterflies, could we, Donna?"

"You could not do without silly, useless Gaie, I know, if that is what you mean, papa," said the younger girl, stooping forward as he stood near her, resting her chin upon her hands, and looking up with bright tenderness into his face.

He let his hand rest softly for a moment on the fair wavy hair before he answered her.

"My darlings," he said, "I do not think that is a good way of looking at it—to cut up the duties of life between different people, and to appoint that one shall be always butterfly, another always ant. It is unfair to the butterfly to suppose her ever giddy and flying idly to and fro; it is bad for the ant that she is to be always laboring, with her eyes and footsteps bent upon the ground. To-day an industrious ant, to-morrow a butterfly enjoying brightness and sunshine and all the playful gladness of life—that is what I want to see you both, my children."

"So I may not be always the butterfly? Ah me, papa!"

"And Donna has been an industrious hard-working

little ant so long, she is going to let Aunt Kellam make a regular butterfly of her for the next six months to come. Dear me! when I think of my two giddy little girls by the end of the season!"

"You wish it, papa?" said Donna earnestly.

"I wish it, my love. You and I have done as much philosophical science and classical literature as is good for both of us. I want you, for some months to come, to enjoy yourselves, and to be as giddy and light-hearted as you can. And now go and sing, Gaie—I have half an hour still before I go to the House; and, Donna, give me a cup of tea."

Gaie sang to him—sweetly, charmingly, her voice thrilling with a fresh, youthful ring in it—full of expression, full of sensitive, musical feeling—sweet, as he had said to her aunt, as the spring song of the mavis in a flowering hawthorn-tree.

You understood something of where that changeful shadow in her eyes' depth came from when you heard her sing. It was an intensely musical nature; music was life to her, as sunshine to the flowers. And it was as yet *all* the expression of her inner self, of the deeper current that flowed under the rippling surface of her life's stream. That look of absent, shadowy thought gleamed strongly from her eyes as she sang now, song after song, to her father; and he drained his tea-cup, and then dropped quietly to sleep.

And Donna?

Has Donna repelled you as a regular blue-stocking—a learned young woman of the day, who prates solemnly of higher education and molecular science, and talks "rose-water metaphysics" with the authoritative air of a German sage? Was Donna, then, a genuine specimen of the modern blue, ready to pass a Cambridge examination or take a degree—all impressed with the serious necessities of her sex in this life, desirous to study medicine, to lecture on philosophy, to write on social science, or to edit a leading journal on the rights of women and the higher faculties of

their minds? Was Donna a genuine specimen of the "exceptional woman"? She could scarcely have answered this question herself. She had had but few associates who had had any powerful influence on her life. It had been moulded really by a single individual influence, and moulded with strong force. Time and leisure had been given for the character to harden in its mould.

So it is ; development of character may often spring from some little transient episode of intercourse between minds that "meet like ships at sea," and pass on, each towards their different havens, affecting each other's lives with a mutual influence of undying power.

There had been in Donna's history an episode in which there had come to her a voice that had said to her repeatedly, during long summer days of their companionship, sentences such as these :

"The deplorable ignorance of women unfits them for important positions in life."

"The education of women is of a nature so frivolous, so aimless, and so unmethodical, that it is impossible that they can turn out anything but the useless and ignorant beings they are."

"A woman's argument is always valueless, because, from ignorance, its basis is always insufficient."

Donna was not a woman in those days, so that these valuable sentiments could be imparted as pieces of information to her without the idea of personal offence. But still they sank deep, for Donna was to become a woman. She was a subject for education ; she must become one of those beings, hopelessly ignorant, deplorably useless, unless she made a strong effort to rescue herself from the obloquy of the threatening fate.

"A woman," as Sydney Smith called her, "a creature who never reasoned, and who could not poke the fire."

Donna came upon this sentence a year or two after

that summer-time, and was amused to find her old friend's humiliating views of the mental faculties of her sex thus quaintly endorsed. She determined to be otherwise. She set to work, to study, and let old imaginations go to the winds.

She found study feasible, and in the gradual culture and development of her powers she gave tacit denial even to herself to the old asseveration that a woman could not *learn*.

Poor little Donna—sweet little learned woman! The strongest thing in her deep nature was still as ever—her tender, though half-extinguished, woman's heart. Heart and mind, habits and tastes of long seclusion—she must bring them all to this new life now.



CHAPTER XXIX.

LADY KELLAM'S IDEALS.

THE dresses were ordered, and the dresses were worn. The girls were presented; Gaie departed herself with as much solemnity as possible, and Lady Curzon Kellam was made happy by her Majesty's special compliments on the grace and fresh, rose-like beauty of her two young protégées.

Lady Kellam was triumphant. Young Lord Doringbroke, the eldest hope of the Harrenleighs, was brought upon the scene, and seemed properly impressed, on the very first occasion, by the charms of Gaie. And Gaie did not say to Aunt Kellam, but only told Donna in confidence, *how* silly she thought him.

Then Sir Robert Carre was presented at an evening crush that Lady Kellam herself gave for her nieces,

and when, she piqued herself, she produced all the best "partis" of the day—scarcely a younger son among them, and most of them with a seat in prospect in the Upper House.

Sir Robert Carre's admiration of Donna was a success still more encouraging, because less confidently expected, than young Dorringbroke's subjugation by Gaie. Sir Robert was evidently struck with the girl, whose manner, simple and dignified, and seemingly all unconscious of his importance, had an attraction for him different from anything he had known before.

He lingered near her all that evening at Lady Kellam's "crush," and Lord Dorringbroke hovered in the light of Gaie's laughing eyes, like a doubtful moth who has not quite made up his mind whether he will condescend to burn his wings or not.

Lady Kellam took care they made acquaintance with everybody they ought to know, and resolved in her own mind to play Lord Dorringbroke and Sir Robert, by judicious encouragement, to a certain point against other equally desirable swains.

But she took care to establish a comfortable, motherly friendship with young Dorringbroke, pressing his arm kindly as he took her down, at her own command, to supper, and begging him, with affectionate interest, to remember that she was always at home to *special* friends for a little cosy chat at half-past five; and Lord Dorringbroke, being a young goose still only half fledged, thought Lady Kellam "the kindest woman, 'pon my honor, the very jolliest old thing conceivable; shouldn't wonder if he did look in on her—to-morrow, perhaps, over her boudoir cup of tea." Young Dorringbroke would have been an easily caught fish, if Lady Kellam could herself have done all the fishing.

Then Lady Kellam turned a perfectly deaf ear to all evil reports, which kind and deeply interested friends took care should duly reach her, as to the character of Sir Robert Carre: she hoped they would

not reach the ears of her brother-in-law ; and, meantime endeavored to teach Donna, with the ingenious care this difficult case required, to encourage Sir Robert, feeling that it would be, indeed, a social triumph if she landed this unimpressionable millionaire with so unpliant an instrument as Donna threatened to prove.

So it went on for some time, and the parliamentary season proceeded.

"No whirl yet, nothing to speak of," Lady Kellam said,—*"only a few drums, and afternoons, and tailed dinners."* Balls and breakfasts, and park and opera, were all to come in the glorious vista beyond Easter.

And all this time Donna never managed to go to Westminster Abbey, to hear a single scientific lecture, or to visit any gallery or museum whatever.

It was early in March that Lady Kellam said, one afternoon, just as she was dropping them at their own door after a long round of visits,—

"My dears—yes, let me see—I dine to-night at the Prussian Embassy, and, of course, I do not fetch you: your father takes you (late, mind; do not let him take you too early, it is so rustic and vulgar!) to—where is it? Oh yes, the first reception at D—— House. I may look in last thing, but I have a whist-party at Mrs. Linton Halloway's at eleven o'clock. But it was about to-morrow I was going to say—in the afternoon. Yes, I am going to take you to the Sarcrofts, in Laburnum Sweep. It is a queer out-of-the-way place, and an odd mixture of people; but everybody goes, so of course you must be seen there. And Gaie, love, wear your Indian silk costume and your rose bonnet; and Donna—let me see, yes, that grey poult-de-soie suits you wonderfully,—that will do; and at half-past five, my darlings, I will call for you. Adieu." And Aunt Kellam drove away.

"I wonder," said Donna, as they turned into the drawing-room and sat down to chat over their cup of tea before going upstairs to dress for dinner,—

wonder what Aunt Kellam calls 'odd people.' Does it not surprise you, Gaie, to find how dull and commonplace nearly everybody is one meets?"

"Oh, Donna, I am not a blue, you know! They often amuse me."

"But, Gaie,"—the two girls had seated themselves in low chairs and taken their tiny, ridiculous bonnets off their heads, and thrown themselves back with a languor and aspect of weariness they had never displayed in the fresh old life at home, and Gaie half closed her eyes with an amused expression as Donna went on,—“you know I used to think about London before we came here, that I should meet all sorts of wonderful people—great artists and philosophers, and those kind of men; and aunt does not seem to me to know, or care about them.”

“You did not expect to find them growing about the streets, as Whittington expected the golden pavement, did you, Donna?”

“No, not exactly that; but I expected a different sort of people from all those we know already. Great, clever men; and women like Madame de Maintenon or Madame de Staël; and aunt seems to me only to know duchesses and countesses, and young stupid men with titles and, what she calls, expectations.”

“And older men—with what objections?” put in Gaie, laughing.

“And older men, who talk of the opera and their French cooks, and their younger days when they say they were foolish, which I can quite believe, and anything and everything, Gaie, that one does not care one straw about; and, oh! it is all a terrible bore.”

“I do not think it is so very bad,” said Gaie. “I rather like teasing young Lord Dorringbroke; and I think they are all very kind and nice.”

“Oh, very; and Aunt Kellam is so kind—only—only;” and she stopped. “Gaie,” she went on, very gravely, “do you know I heard papa and Mr. Henry

Denford talking of Piers Ashton at the Premier's last night."

"Did you, Donna?" and Gaie sat straight upright and fixed her eyes with questioning interest on her sister's face.

"Yes; and I could not help listening, you know, it is so long since we have heard of him; and one cannot help being anxious and longing to hear about a friend one has known all one's life—can we, Gaie?"

"Of course we cannot," said Gaie, with defiance and decision.

"And then it has been so much worse since that last time papa wrote to him to Paris, remonstrating on his ways, and we got no answer, and papa became angry, and forbade us to speak of him in his presence, or even to mention his name."

"Of course it has," said Gaie, "it has been dreadful since then; and Aunt Kellam made papa much worse by all she said," added Gaie, with indignation.

"Yes, of course; but if she did see Piers with those dreadful sort of people in Paris, it was natural she should repeat it; and then Count de Hanton told her he had taken up entirely with a most unsatisfactory class both of women and men. I wonder in what way he could have meant—unsatisfactory." And Donna looked thoughtful and concerned.

"I am sure Piers would never like anybody who was wicked," said Gaie, in energetic defence of her old playfellow of the boats and hills.

"No," said Donna, "not wicked exactly; but Gaie, I wonder *who* that dark girl was that Aunt Kellam saw with him at Fontainebleau."

"Let me see; I forget. What did she say of her?" said Gaie.

"Oh, she only saw her passing, you know. She recognized Piers, but she seemed to think his associates *too* extraordinary admit of her speaking to him. Then it was, you know, papa wrote again and never

had an answer ; since then, he and aunt both refuse to speak of Piers."

"What did you hear last night, Donna?"

"Oh, it was mostly political—about the prospects in France, and the murder of Victor Noir, and the Plébiscite ; then they went on to talk of the 'Universal,'—you know, the society Piers wrote about ; and they abused it very much, and papa looked very grave, and shook his head, and said something about Piers. He deplored him, and said he was misguided and obstinate to a lamentable degree. I wonder if Piers will ever come right, Gaie."

"I am sure he will."

"And oh ! how I do wonder where he is."

"There is no use wondering ; and, oh, Donna, there is papa coming in with his latch-key ; and it is more than twenty minutes since the dressing-bell rang."

"Well," said Donna, rising, "to return to the subject we started with, nearly all Aunt Kellam's 'set,' as she calls them, bore me almost beyond endurance ; and I must say I have some hope from her evident opinion of the party at Laburnum Sweep,—who knows ? they may be sufficiently queer and unconventional to be interesting, as they are odd enough to be disapproved of by her. Let us be off to dress,—we shall keep papa waiting ; and to-morrow I shall be all expectation for Laburnum Sweep."

Donna was not far wrong in her estimate and expectation of Laburnum Sweep, or of that particular house in the Sweep to which, next afternoon, at five o'clock, Lady Kellam conducted her and Gaie.

Laburnum Sweep is a row of quaint, old-fashioned residences, away beyond the familiar precincts of west-end London, in the Battersea direction, beyond the river, beyond the huge gas-works, beyond an infinitude of dreary suburban abodes of the humblest and most unattractive nature. You pass all these in driving to Laburnum Sweep, but you left all behind you when you reached it. Laburnum Sweep itself is a charm-

ing old place. The houses seem to stand in large undulating parks of their own, so carefully are their roofs and chimneys screened one from the other by the fine old trees. The nightingales sing in these trees in the summer evenings; and the gardens surrounding each house are beautiful.

They drove down the Sweep under the shadow of large old elms with low hanging branches; they turned in at a gateway, round a bit of smooth lawn, and up to the door of an ancient square-built house, with new bow-windows and conservatory, and queer rooms stuck on indiscriminately on every side. Lady Kellam gathered her skirts together and said, "Now, my dears, you first, please;" and they realized that they had reached Mrs. Sarcroft's door.

They entered first a low, old-fashioned hall. It looked dusky in the half-twilight of the afternoon, but warm and comfortable. A large fire burning brightly in a huge open fireplace on one side threw its reflection over the quaint furnishing, upon the stars of curious antique weapons high upon the walls, upon pictures, busts, and medallions, cases of old coins and miniatures, and on the large bureau covered with antique silver and Indian falence standing on each side.

"The Sarcrofts are great connoisseurs in 'objets d'art,' you know," said Lady Kellam, indifferently, as the girls paused to look around them, and both exclaimed with delight,—"*fond of bric-à-brac* of all descriptions. Come away, my dears. Lady Curzon Kellam and the Miss Graemes," she added in pompous tones to the servant as she shook out her skirts.

A door was opened instantly on one side of the fireplace, their names were loudly uttered upon the threshold, and the two girls, following their aunt closely, found themselves in a large room, lighted softly by numberless pink-shaded lamps, and full from end to end with a crowd of people talking, laughing, sauntering to and fro, drinking tea and coffee, exam-

ining the beautiful prints and sketches that covered the walls, peering into Mrs. Sarcroft's renowned aquarium, and admiring her magnificent show of heaths and camellias in the conservatory that opened off the room ; amusing and enjoying themselves with the ease and success which always distinguished Mrs. Sarcroft's receptions at Laburnum Sweep.

Her history had been curious and varied. The daughter of a man high up in the British diplomatic service, she had lived in prominent position in nearly every capital of Europe. Then—she had married a poor man for love and her position had altered.

Lady Kellam returned her warm greeting with a manner thawed to friendliness in spite of herself. Gaie smiled with radiant brightness from every dimple round her pretty lips, as Mrs. Sarcroft looked into her face with undisguised admiration ; and Donna felt the warm little hand clasp hers, and answered Mrs. Sarcroft's expression of pleasure at their introduction with a feeling of interest and enjoyment quite genuine and delightful.

"You must have heaps of friends," she exclaimed, glancing round, as she still held Donna's hand with a soft, light clasp. "Let me see—oh, yes ! Lady Kellam has found the Duchess of Arrowby. I must tell Theodore to take them some tea ; and, ah ! she is beckoning to you, dear,—she wants to present you. But I will come and fetch you presently ; I cannot leave you there. I have a lot of young people playing something ridiculous in the other room. I will come for you in a minute."

And before the introduction to the old Duchess (a very important acquaintance for young *débutantes*) was quite completed, back she came again.

Donna was answering the stately old lady's shrewd questions, and standing in front of her, under the scrutiny of the quick-searching eyes ; so Mrs. Sarcroft could not interrupt them, but she seized upon Gaie.

"Come away, dear child," she said ; "why should

you be boxed up with the artistic and literary elders here? Come into the other room. Do you not hear them laughing? Quite shocking! I must go in to keep order. They have got Carlo Robbins and Arthur Brown in there, and a lot of young nephews of Theodore's—Guardsmen—only boys, you know; and they have beguiled Lucy Errington and Helen Percy in, too—what will the Duchess say?—and some other girls; and I do believe they are playing Dumb Crambo! Let us go in and look; it will be worth while to see Carlo Robbins, with his enormous height, doing his part. I'll be bound he will choose to act the baby!"

It was certainly great fun in the other room, where the two young comic actors vied with each other to keep up the ball, and where they found the greatest sculptor of the day playing a rebellious schoolboy, and a well-known man, whose brain was publicly supposed to be encrusted with the dust of cuneiform stones and Egyptian hieroglyphics, joining with mirth and laughter in the effort to reduce his row of short-trousered six-foot high school-children to order.

Mrs. Sarcroft stood in fits of laughter at the door, and Gaie soon caught the spirit of it, and in a very few minutes found herself joining the game, and adding to the merriment the sunny radiance of her own bright smiles and the musical echo of her happy laughter. "Odd people, certainly!" as Lady Kellam with some justice had said; but most of them people *great* enough not to fear any injury to their dignity by joining in the hearty merriment of the young party there.

Meanwhile, Donna, soon abandoned to her own devices, while the Duchess and Lady Kellam plunged into confidential discourse, glanced round her as she stood in the crowd, and took in the curious, brilliant scene. She scarcely knew any one near her, and many all through the rooms, indeed, were strangers to her. She saw here and there familiar faces of people from *Lady Kellam's* particular set, with whom she had already made acquaintance—boring, conventional, nar-

row-minded people, who wandered among this curious throng, and looked like birds from a different clime. But they were only a small sprinkling ; and the numberless faces, old and young, dark and fair (nearly all with an unmistakably artistic or intellectual look about them) were unknown to her.

Mrs. Sarcroft, leaving Gaie happy in the other room, had come back, and flitted now in every corner among her guests. She glanced towards Donna, and saw her still standing by her aunt—detained by her, and speaking still to the Duchess, as she imagined ; so Mrs. Sarcroft turned her thoughts to other guests.

And presently—Donna saw her walk up the room, holding by one hand a lady, whose appearance seemed to attract some considerable attention as she passed along.

She detected Donna standing silent and alone. Her hostess's kind anxious instinct was roused immediately : she remembered her young guest was a stranger, and she feared she might be dull ; besides, the sweet earnest face attracted her. She came across the room.

"Will you not sit down, dear?" she said, with a soft pretty fall of her voice upon the caressing epithet, quite peculiar to her winning little self, as she laid her hand on Donna's arm.

"Ah, here is a seat : you have stood such a long time. This will do beautifully : room for you by my own sweetest friend. Dear madame," she continued to the lady before whom she suddenly paused, "will you allow me to introduce to you Miss Graeme—our last charming *débutante*—and, Miss Graeme, let me present you to—*Madame Prioleau*. You will like her so much, dear," she whispered to Donna ; "charming—*quite* an exceptional woman, I assure you."

In consequence of this last explanatory sentence, Donna sat down with considerable reluctance, and turned with much misgiving to this yet another new acquaintance she was called upon to make ; and she said

nothing ; she was unwilling for the introduction. But it was inevitable. Mrs. Sarcroft insisted ; Donna had to acquiesce. So, very ungraciously and with much reluctance, she was obliged to sit down and to turn her eyes upon this other "exceptional woman's" face. As she looked—she never could quite explain to herself what the impression was—but her sentiments seemed instantly to change ; a feeling of repose and refreshment seemed to creep over her, and her gaze lingered in a silence long and most unusual between two people just introduced—a silence on both sides for Madame Prioleau too was looking at her with kind of half-puzzled expression of inquiry in her beautiful grey eyes—an expression as if trying to remember something, as if an association was coming back to her, and she could not quite tell what it was.

Then at last, quite suddenly, she put out her fine gentle hand and laid it upon Donna's with a warm clasp.

"Yes, I am sure," she said, without further preface or commentary, "it *must* be. Miss Graeme, are you very like your father?"

Donna answered brightly, somehow without feeling any great astonishment ; it seemed so natural and easy to answer that speaking, sympathetic face.

"Yes," she said, "I am exactly like all the Graemes and every one says I am just the image of papa."

"How curious," Madame Prioleau continued, taking the girl's hand into the clasp of both her own. "And did not your father travel in America in the year '41, with two other young Englishmen ; and did they not come down to the Southern States and stay at Illinois, Miss Graeme?"

"Papa did go to America, I know," said Donna "but it was before he married ; and Mr. Derrington his great friend, went with him, and others, I think and I have often heard him talk of Illinois, and the kindness they met with there."

"I knew it was the same ; he visited us,"

Madame Prioleau. "You are wonderfully like him. I never forget a face, and above all I should not easily forget his. Ah !" she added, sighing, "I was very young then ; and that was such a bright beautiful winter he spent in our house. We all talk still in Illinois of him, the brave kind Englishman, who was such a favorite with old and young."

"How very curious !" said Donna, looking still with a sense of strong interest into Madame Prioleau's face. "How pleased papa will be to see you again."

"I am sure he will be all unchanged in his kindly friendship," she answered. "I know Englishmen never do change in friendship and never forget. It will be pleasant to talk over old-day stories with him, though, alas ! you are too young," she added, stopping herself in the saddening tendency of her tone—"you are too young to understand how melancholy may be the retrospect towards an acquaintance of so long ago."

"I can well imagine it," Donna answered, "for even papa, you know——" she hesitated.

"Yes, yes," replied Madame Prioleau, "he has found and lost again his life's best treasure since then. But it makes me happy to meet you, dear child, and to see how richly the place has been filled."

"Papa is quite happy now, I think," said Donna ; "He is so fond of Gaie and me."

"No doubt of it ; and I shall be able to bring myself to his recollection without rousing memories too painful, at all events to him. And it pleases me to hear it, for I almost feared——He was engaged to your dear mother, my child, when he was with us in Illinois, and I well remember the happy 'badinage' over the advent of every post."

"How wonderful it seems," said Donna, her eyes still lingering upon the calm earnest countenance of Madame Prioleau ; "ten minutes ago only I was introduced to you, and now I feel—I seem to know you *much better* than any one in this room,—better than *any one I have met* since I came to London."

It did seem strange to Donna; but she did know that she was speaking to one whose rare wonderful gift was that of winning her way to a head confidence in short transient moments of time. She did not know that this quick human sympathy, tender and sensitive, was the divine-like gift that made the woman exceptional. She did not know that the serene quiet gaze that entered her heart now with a sweet thrill of awakening love had won many a wounded soul to a like strong confidence, reposeful and full of gladdening peace, on many a woful battle-field, many a low hospital bed, when the racked and head-laden sufferer had but these few minutes to live.

That was Madame Prioleau's gift, rare, wonderful and almost divine. Her heart thrilled with a passion of human sympathy, that, gleaming from her quiet eyes, wept with every human sufferer, and made every human grief her own.

"Will you come and see papa?" said Donna presently.

"Gladly, if I may; and will you come and see Miss Graeme? I do not like to think our acquaintance is to be limited to crowded meetings like this."

"Oh, may I?" exclaimed Donna.

"Certainly; I shall look forward to seeing you with pleasure indeed. I feel—I am very quick in the things, you know—I feel we shall suit each other, and be friends," said Madame Prioleau gently. "When will you come to see me?—to-morrow?"

"If I may; oh! I should like it!" said Donna, turning towards the fine soft face again. "Oh! if you let me, I should so like it. When may I come?"

"To-morrow about five. Come in and have tea with me. But stay, you do not know where I live. There—I have written it down for you. My town house is just at the corner of Tilney Street, as you turn in by the Chesterfield Gardens to Mayfair. *not this your aunt coming to us?*"

"Yes, and here is Gaie, my sister, Madame P

leau ; you must know her, too." And Donna sprang up with unusual energy and eagerness ; and at that moment Lady Kellam, with Mrs. Sarcroft, approached them, and Madame Prioleau was presented to Donna's aunt and chaperon.

Then Gaie was brought to her, and she looked with bright admiration and interest into the fair blooming face ; and she thought her radiant and beautiful, but she did not touch the sympathy and interest of Madame Prioleau quite so quickly as Donna had done.

"My dear children, I must run away with you," said Lady Kellam, when her civilities with Madame Prioleau had been exchanged. "I have to dine to-night with the Bishop of D——. Good-bye, dear Madame Prioleau, and Mrs. Sarcroft, *adieu*."

"Ah, a few minutes, dear Lady Kellam," pleaded Mrs. Sarcroft. "Do not rob us so early of your two lovely girls. The room will have lost its chief ornaments, I assure you, when you are gone. Stay, just a few minutes."

"A thousand regrets," persisted Lady Kellam. "But the Bishop's dinner ; and I know it is nearly seven, and I have to drive the two girls home before I go on to Brook Street to dress. I must go."

"Ah, I am so sorry !—and my two young travellers still to come. Such charming young men, I assure you : I cannot think what makes them so late. The young Frenchman is quite distinguished ; so interesting,—he has really been everywhere."

"Who are they ?" said Lady Kellam, pausing with some little curiosity. She thought she knew every one distinguished or worth knowing, at least by name, in town.

"Oh," continued Mrs. Sarcroft, "they have just arrived—returned from Persia just now, I believe. I met them in Syria a year ago. Madame Prioleau knows them. You remember, dear madame, Orestes and Pylades, eh ? They are coming here, I am in

hopes, this evening still. Oh, you know one, at all events, Lady Kellam—Mr. — *Dear Duchess*, you are not going to leave us?"

And little Mrs. Sarcroft had to break off in her explanation, and rush away for a moment, to clasp the hand of the grim old Duchess of Arrowby in a tender farewell.

Lady Curzon Kellam took the opportunity of slipping away. She really had that dinner at the Bishop's to overtake, and there was no saying when Mrs. Sarcroft would return. So she forgot her interest in the two unknown and mysterious young travellers, and she signed to her nieces to follow her from the room.

Another moment, and they had passed through the beautiful old hall again; they were shut into her swinging chariot, and were driving swiftly home.

CHAPTER XXX.

ONE THING.

THE carriage which contained Lady Curzon Kellam, with her two nieces, had scarcely turned out of the gateway of Laburnum Sweep, when there entered, walking along by the frosty pathway, and sauntering up under the shadow of the old elms, two young men in close and eager conversation.

They entered the house, passed into the still crowded drawing-room, and in a few minutes were exchanging a cordial greeting with Mr. Sarcroft and his cheery little wife.

There had been every variety of men in that room that afternoon—men young and old, men English and foreign—artistic men, literary men—a motley crowd of varied type; but among them all, these two last arti-

vals were instantly distinguished by every curious and observant eye. Who were they? where had they come from?

"Handsome"—"Foreigners certainly"—"Ah! the travellers, no doubt." Such remarks buzzed around them, as our two friends, both a little changed since we last saw them, stood in the centre of the crowded room, and returned Mrs. Sarcroft's affectionate greeting.

"Ah, Orestes! Ah, *mon cher* Pylades! *Milles fois les bienvenus!*"

Mrs. Sarcroft was a little woman, who always found her enthusiastic sentiments most easily expressed in French.

Victor stood smiling before her, bright and graceful as ever, his fair cheek a little bronzed by these years of travel, his eye keener and more full of power and energy; but still very unchanged, the same sunny, boyish, smiling Victor he had been at Cambridge and in Paris years ago.

Beside him stood Piers, much the most altered of the two: A Frenchman, even when really half Scotch, as was Victor, is a being that develops early to maturity. An Englishman is quite the contrary. He generally ripens slowly; he continues to alter long. If we knew him, and wondered over his future, at twenty-one, it is probable we wonder more over the altered and perhaps unexpected results when we meet him again at thirty. A Frenchman alters fifty times in a twelvemonth, and rebounds again always into—himself. An Englishman alters slowly, by gradual, steady degrees, and the alteration implies development and progress. It is the mellowing of the crude roughness of youth that has taken place: for good or bad, the character has been built up, the man has altered from the unfinished boy; but the man is made now, and will not alter again.

So any old friend of Piers Ashton would have felt as *they watched him standing by Victor's side that*

evening, answering Mrs. Sarcroft's queries with a little of his old gravity, but with perfect self-possession and ease. The self-consciousness had left him—that shy boyish *gaucherie* that had stamped him in old days a British fledgling wherever he went; and that curious air of defiant obstinacy with which he used to disguise his shyness was gone as well. The natural sweetness of his dark eyes, and the well-bred grace of his simple manners, had easy play.

Piers would have been singled out now in any assemblage as a handsome, thorough-bred, distinguished-looking Englishman. It was still rather a dreamy face; the eyes had a way of drooping under their long dark lashes, with an absent look in them, as if his thoughts were wandering vaguely away; and the crimson color retained a youthful trick of rushing over his cheek, if people spoke to him suddenly, or any new acquaintance scrutinized his countenance with too curious a gaze. He wore a moustache now, and a short-cut pointed beard.

Mrs. Sarcroft admired Piers enormously, and was a little afraid of him. She admired Victor, if anything, still more—in fact, *him* she adored with the frank undisguised devotion which it was generally his happy fortune to inspire.

The two had arrived only the night before in London, and their present host had been the first acquaintance they met. Their last *rencontre* had been in the Vale of Jehoshaphat, in the far East; and they had cemented, during their sojourn in that neighborhood, one of those friendships that spring up so rapidly among travellers encountering each other as kindred spirits in foreign lands; and Mrs. Sarcroft was now enchanted to welcome them to her home.

"I am so glad to see you," she exclaimed again and again. "I have been telling all kinds of people you were coming, this whole afternoon; and no doubt you have got numbers of friends—people, I dare say, *you have met* in all corners of the globe."

His eyes had caught some one else, far away, down at the other end of the room. He moved quickly away, and hurried with two eager hands extended towards Madame Prioleau.

"My dear boy ! Are *you* Mrs. Sarcroft's traveller ?"

"Dear, dear friend !" He slipped into a seat beside her, and in an instant they had plunged into the warmest discourse.

Where had he been ? It would take weeks to tell her. Where had she been ?—it was impossible to describe in this one little hour. What had he done ?—ah ! difficult to express in any sort of language. What had she done ?—the newspapers and that glittering cross of the order of St. John, hanging on the ribbon round her throat, had already told him without a single word.

Then—friends had to be discussed, mutual friends, dear—more than dear, well-beloved to each. One after another were mentioned, and they exchanged information upon all.

"And your friend ? How improved he is ; how handsome he has grown !"

"Has he not ?"

"And he still goes along with you ?"

"Oh, of course ; we do everything together. I could not imagine life without him."

"Orestes and Pylades," she answered, laughing softly, as she watched his enthusiastic gaze towards his friend.

"Exactly," he continued. "Ah, well ! surely it is a satisfaction to feel there is something real left in life—somebody that will not alter—something that will not prove a dream ?"

"And you have, neither of you, *ever* found a somebody for each of you—a personification of all you dream ?" she asked.

"My queen, my queen !" murmured Victor softly. "No, madame ; she is a fair phantom. I am pursuing her *still*, with eager longing, I assure you. Do you

know, in confidence I tell you, Madame Prioleau (a genuinely appropriate secret it is to tell a woman friend), I often think Piers nurses in his silent soul of his some very, very old and, to me, known ideal. He has taken to talking of the days of his youth in a sentimental manner lately; and I more than half suspect this return to England has a deeply-hidden tender meaning to him."

"But would he not tell you?" she asked.

"No; there are some things fellows never tell to each other, even to their dearest friends. There are some memories would have their bloom swept off them by the faintest revelation; and some names would be tarnished in our own hearts by speaking them even in the tenderest tone, and—well, I do not know anything about it, you see; but I mean to watch Piers."

"And is he still in sympathy a Universalist?"

"Madame Prioleau," Victor answered earnestly, "that he is like most of us; he has awakened from an old cherished dream. He has a strong wish now present to see his former guardian again; and that, I think, is one cause of his return to England. They have not met for years; and there is some coldness between them. Ah! Sarcroft has, at last, released him: here he comes." And Victor rose to make room for Piers, as the latter, with hand eagerly extended, approached Madame Prioleau to claim a recognition in his turn.

A few cordial words passed between them, then she rose to go.

"How you have kept me!" she said to them, "wonder if dear little Mrs. Sarcroft ever dines: afternoon friends never seem to wish to leave. What pleasant *réunions* hers always are! and to have been doubly charming. Do you know," she continued, turning to Piers, "I shall remember this afternoon, Mr. Ashton, by an event almost as pleasant *my meeting* with you two again. I have made a new acquaintance, who has charmed me—a countrywoman."

of yours. I feel she is going to interest me very much."

"Indeed!" said Piers. "I wish I were as fortunate as you are, madame. I have never found my countrywomen very interesting; at least, certainly, not for many years."

"How many of them have you seen, misanthropist?" exclaimed Victor.

"Certainly, very few for ages," Piers admitted. "But I have been back in London twenty-four hours, and I do not feel converted yet."

"What unpardonable impatience! Well, at all events, you shall not make a cynic of me. I am charmed with my two pretty sisters, and the oldest has already quite won a soft place in my heart. But, then, their father was my very old friend; and I think I loved easily that bright young face, reflecting my old pleasant memory of Sir John Graeme."

"Sir John Graeme!" exclaimed Piers; and the deep, sudden crimson flush colored for an instant his dark face.

"Yes, of course," said Madame Prioleau, looking straight at him; "my sisters are the two beautiful Miss Graemes. Why, everybody is talking about them."

"Donna and Gaie Graeme!" continued Piers, with astonished emphasis. "They were here, in this room, to-day?"

"Just five minutes before you entered it."

"Extraordinary! How I wish I had come ten minutes sooner!" he exclaimed cordially.

"I wish you had. You know them, then?"

"Why, my guardian (my uncle, as I always called him) was Sir John Graeme."

"How very odd! What a combination of curious coincidences! How unlucky you did not come in a quarter of an hour earlier. But, after all, it does not matter: you will see them at any time. Let me think. Why, at five o'clock to-morrow, Miss Graeme has

promised to come to visit me. Shall I tell her? But no: why, what nonsense I am talking! Of course you will see her at once, in the morning, long before I do."

Piers's face became very grave.

"I do not know about that," he said. "Madame Prioleau, you are to see her to-morrow. Would you mind, kindly, as a particular favor, *not* mentioning her name to her?"

"Certainly not, if you do not wish it," she replied with slight astonishment in her tones.

"No; please not just yet," he said. "The fact is, madame, I may not see them after all. It is very unfortunate, but my guardian is seriously offended with me, and I suppose he has good cause to be so. You will easily understand. He did not altogether approve of my politics, and my proceedings generally when I was quite a young fellow, and went off in the harum-scarum way, without taking my degree at Cambridge. But afterwards he wrote me a letter, a capital, kind letter, just like himself, and unfortunately came to the Hôtel Barreilles after Vic. and I had left it years ago, and the *gérant*, a particular friend of mine, and a funny, queer-notioned old boy, not being able to hear of our whereabouts, laid it up in a safe for my preservation for me till we appeared the other day, and then he gave it me, as we were passing through on our way here; and with it was a second letter sent, you see, after the first, to which my guardian had had no reply. The first was kindness itself, full of entreaty and remonstrance on what some one has evidently (indeed, he confessed it) been reporting of him, as to my very evil ways. It was the sort of letter I would not have left a day unanswered for a kingdom—and there it lay; and with it the second, which was the most fiery, indignant effusion I ever read from my guardian's pen. I knew he could work up into his wrath now and then; but I never imagined he could emit such a volcanic outburst as that. But he

evidently tired of me and my Bohemianism, and the letter informed me that he washed his hands of me for ever—would not see me again—shut his doors against me, and pronounced me every vagabond reprobate epithet you please. It was the last letter, he said, he would ever write me, and evidently he never wrote again; and only imagine what he must think of me, both these letters unanswered to this day!"

"How very unfortunate!" said Madame Prioleau.

"Is it not? And, by the tone of both letters, somebody had evidently been maligning me and all my friends most unconscionably to him."

"Dear! too vexatious! But if old Sir John is anything like what I remember the young Sir John, he will easily be brought to listen to explanations."

"He is very tough and irascible," said Piers doubtfully. "I must try and find him to-morrow morning, and meantime you will now understand my request. You see, unless he quite makes it up with me, I should not like Donna to hear anything about me. My uncle (I call him so most naturally) might think I was trying to approach him through her."

"I quite see," said Madame Prioleau quietly; and Victor, who had stood silent all this time looking into Piers's flushed and eager face, turned away at this point, and blew a low prolonged whistle to himself. He had already begun the surreptitious watching of his friend!

"I *must* go," said Madame Prioleau again.

"Let me take you to your carriage then," said Piers; and he led her away, leaving Victor deserted.

"Ah, hah!" said the latter, sagely, to himself, as he watched them disappear through the room. "Ah! the sweet distant aroma of the rose!"

"And you are really to see Donna Graeme to-morrow?" Piers said, as he led Madame Prioleau across the hall.

"Yes, certainly; I hope I am. She interests me

extremely ; she is one of the most charming and most utterly unaffected girls I have ever known."

"Is she?" he said, as he put his friend into her carriage, and clasped her kind hand once more.

"She is. I am perfectly charmed with her."

"Good night," Piers said. His tone was dreamy and absent, and Madame Prioleau looked curiously and with an amused expression into his face. "Good night," he said again ; and then the carriage drove off, and left him standing on the door-step alone.

In two minutes Victor found him there, and roused him, by a friendly clap on the shoulder, from his misty memory, and his formless, shadowy, prospective, and retrospective dream.



CHAPTER XXXI.

TWILIGHT CONFERENCE.

WHEN Donna arrived next day at the house in Tilney Street, Mayfair, the afternoon was just passing into evening, and the twilight of the chilly March day was falling soft and dusky in Madame Prioleau's little room.

Donna had had a skirmish over that visit with Lady Kellam at luncheon. It was not at all according to the aunt's ideas that girls should be allowed to form independent intimacies, especially with out-of-the-way sort of people like Madame Prioleau.

But Sir John had come in suddenly upon the controversy, and had utterly pooh-poohed Lady Kellam's scruples. For Donna had told him in the morning of her meeting with his old friend at Laburnum Sweep.

"Ah, how very odd ! I remember the Prioleau perfectly," he had said. "Delightful people, most in

and hospitable to Derrington and me. And I remember the daughter especially ; a very handsome girl she was in those days, Donna ; but that is five-and-twenty years ago. Let me see, she must have been about sixteen at that time, and—yes, I remember perfectly—she was already engaged to be married to a handsome wild young cousin, a Prioleau too. I wonder if she ever did marry him ? I suppose so. ‘Madame’ Prioleau, they call her, do they not ? Yes, it was a French settlement there, and they were all of French descent. No doubt she is a widow. Certainly, go and see her, and say that, with her permission, I will call upon her to-morrow morning : I fear I cannot manage it to-day.”

So Lady Kellam, though fuming and indignant, was quite overruled, and Donna went.

Her new friend had excited a strange interest in her mind. These quick responsive currents of sympathy are curious things in our human nature. Donna was not a psychologist, and did not analyze the feeling ; she only knew she longed to see Madame Prioleau again, and she longed to talk to her, for she had an instinctive conviction that Madame Prioleau would understand what she said.

The room was very dusky as she entered ; outside there was a fog falling ; it was nearly dark ; but the little simple apartment looked cosy and home-like ; a bright fire burned cheerily in the grate, a low tea-table stood near it, a little couch, a couple of large easy-chairs on either side, a well-filled bookcase opposite, a table covered with work and every variety of literature in the centre of the room.

Madame Prioleau sat in a window recess, at a writing-table covered with packets of papers and piles of lengthy-looking documents, one of which, by the light of a small green-shaded lamp, she was busily perusing when Donna entered, making pencil notes, as she read, on the broad margin of each page.

She rose instantly.

"My dear child, I am so glad to see you."

"But you are so busy," Donna said. "I am only disturbing you."

"No; I am glad to be disturbed. I have been sitting here through all the dusk and fog of this thoroughly London day, and it seemed still little more than morning when I had to light my lamp. You will do me a great deal of good. Sit down. Here, take this little seat."

And Madame Prioleau seated herself in a corner of the couch, and made Donna draw the low fauteuil close to her, the tiny tea-table between them. Madame Prioleau certainly looked pale and weary this evening. She remained silent for a few minutes, and Donna's eyes wandered to the writing-table and its crowded evidences of hard work.

"How delightful to be so occupied!" she said. "It must be so interesting to have found so much to do."

"I find it more interesting to rest sometimes," Madame Prioleau answered, "and to turn to other people and their work. Are you wondering what all that is about?" she added, smiling, as Donna's eyes still turned to her window-recess.

"Very much," the girl answered with ready frankness. "You know, I do wonder, Madame Prioleau, what exceptional people like you, who have regular careers and settled occupations—what it *is* exactly you find all day long to do?"

"This is an idle time with me, you see," Madame Prioleau answered, "and I am taking the opportunity to revise all my papers on Nursing, that I jotted down hurriedly, in the course of many suggestive experiences, and I hope to have them ready in a few weeks for the press."

"To print them?" said Donna.

"Of course, yes. I wrote them with that object. I hope they may perhaps do good."

"How delightful!" sighed Donna. "What a perfect life! You not only have a career, a great,

definite, glorious career of your own, but you write books besides, and in your idle minutes achieve the utmost ambitions of our smaller souls."

"Is your utmost ambition to write a book, dear child?"

"To write a book?" Donna answered. "No, not exactly; at least, sometimes it is. But my ambitions vary so, Madame Prioleau; yours, I suppose, never do?"

"As to ambition, I do not know that I have ever had any. Long ago I used to be told I was culpably void of that quality; but I do not now think it *was* culpable."

She paused a moment, and was silent again. Then she stooped forward and poured out some tea.

"I have made myself very tired this evening," she said. "It has been so good for me that you have come. I have been doing trying work—reading old manuscripts of years ago, and reviving memories that I thought had lost their pain."

"Dear Madame Prioleau!"

"Yes, I find this inactive literary life tries me; action, even though often of a painful kind, has been so long my habit."

"Are you going to stay here in London permanently now?"

"I do not in the least know. At this moment there seems a curious pause in all my work; and, looking around, I cannot quite decide where my next field of action is to lie. Of course there is plenty for all to do here in London, if once I determine to settle."

"Madame Prioleau, what do *you* think? Does it not seem to you that a life that has had high ideals and great aspirations, and good, genuine, beautiful thoughts about things, even if it does go in a wrong way and makes every kind of mistake for years, must be nobler than the sort of lives I see people leading here in London, going all straight and happily for themselves?"

"My dear child, whatever is good and genuine and

great, as you express it, in ideal and aspiration, in constitute nobility in a heart, and produce it in life

"It will, at last, I know; it must go right-must."

"I do not see how it can go wrong."

"Yes, it can; very wrong. There may be mistakes and false conceptions; there are, I know. But, d Madame Prioleau, if you had ever seen a high ideal this kind, could you ever care for, could you descend, I mean, to anything lower?"

"Do you mean to any lower type of person?"

"Yes; that is one of the puzzling things in my that I want to ask you about."

"Are you talking in the abstract of an imaginative ideal, or of an individual? I scarcely understand you."

"I dare say not. I can scarcely tell sometimes myself; it is so long ago. But, madame, I know I selfish. I try to be abstract and universal, as you are in my interest; but I cannot. And yet it is taken from me, quite as much as from you,—I mean my ideal. And it has not made me unselfish, as it has you; I cannot, I cannot cease to think about—*him*, or who he would come right."

"Tell me more," said madame, in her sweet caring voice; and she put her arm around the girl, and drew her close to her; and Donna, who had been waiting to have Gaie and all around her lean on her quiet strength, and to keep her hidden heartache in silence to herself, turned gladly to Madame Prioleau, with happy, reposeful sense of perfect confidence, and went on.

"It was long ago, long ago, you know. It began when I was quite a child. We were so lonely, at the Old Towers; and from the first time Piers came made such a difference, and we did everything together. Gaie was so much younger than I; and the more he came, and the older we both grew, we seemed more and more to be so happy. He taught me ev

thing,—to care for everything, I mean. It always seems to me he gave me the key to all that became myself. And then, at last, years ago, he went away, and things seemed all to go wrong in his character; and papa heard those dreadful stories about him, and we may not even speak of him now. And it seems so terrible. He used to be so good and noble; and I thought he would become so useful and great. But it has all gone wrong; and now I do not care for my life in the least. Why should I try to be anything such as women call great and exceptional, while everything is so wrong with him? I try to devote myself, and I try to be interested and study and work; but I am always thinking of him, and wondering where he is, and what he is doing with his life. And then I think, what a poor thing at best my career must be; and how great and noble his might have been, with his talent and his power. I should have been so proud of him, if he had stayed with us and let me always be his friend. He used to say I helped him. Ah! you see, dear madame, how selfish and individual *I* am."

Madame Prioleau smoothed the glossy head with her firm, gentle hand. She was thinking of that dark face on the doorstep, as she drove away from Laburnum Sweep the night before, and feeling it was fortunate for the gradual development of this little romance that she was bound to silence. But she felt happy and full of hope for this true-hearted girl, whose thoughtful, earnest character had filled her with so much interest. The sensitive nature seemed certainly of an organization too delicate, and much too fragile and sympathetic, to be destined for the rôle of the woman exceptional and self-dependent. She knew enough of a woman's heart to realize this, and she felt glad that there was probably a different future in store for Donna now.

"And then, madame," Donna added, "when I have once known such a character, and it has become my ideal, *should I ever strive to expel it from my memory, and to reconcile myself to a lower standard? Should*

we not be faithful to what has seemed to us the highest?"

"Certainly," said Madame Prioleau; though perhaps, save for that last ten minutes the night before at Mrs. Sarcroft's, she would not have expressed herself so emphatically or so unreservedly on this question of fidelity to a past ideal. But Piers's words and manner were still in her memory, and she had already heard the rumor of Sir Robert Carre. So she repeated with a clear conscience and earnest decision, "Yes, yes, beyond everything be faithful to your best ideal."

"I am so glad you say so," said Donna.

"But," continued madame, as Donna rose to leave, "dear child, trust in your future still. You are young and bright; and God grant it may bloom for you in full richness of blessing. And if it should be so, let me say a word in reference to the subject with which our conversation began. Remember, even as you would continue to do if your own life remained as it is now—remember always, with every power of influence you may ever possess, this question of the cause of women; consider it in all the many-sided aspects in which it must be regarded."

"I shall think a great deal about it," said Donna.

"Do not forget it, at all events, my dear, however much circumstances may alter in your own life. I am afraid the indifference and selfishness of the domestic woman is sometimes as great an evil as the uneducated inability of the independent. Woman has a higher power through influence, in these days, than has ever been committed to her in the most chivalrous and poetic ages of the world; so much so, that the view we take *naturally* is that a man is swayed in his most important decisions, and receives the decided bias of *his* character, from feminine influence in the different *relations* of domestic life. Through brothers, fathers, husbands, and sons, how much might women do, and how little do they care! Will you remember this,

Donna : if your heart is ever quite full with the richness of your own life, and your interests do not seem to have a single empty corner in their whole range, will you remember this little last homily, if power is ever entrusted to you ? I am convinced, even in this unromantic generation, that this is the course through which a true and efficient interest in the woman-question may be won. You will not forget it ?”

“I will not, I will not, dear madame. But I am not going to marry any one : I am going to be faithful to my—first ideal.”

“Ah, well, we shall see about that.”

“I am sure of it,” said Donna. “Before I came to you this evening, I had a feeling that I was weary of the struggle with my own life ; I was weary of keeping up my own standard, tired of my efforts to be universal in my interests, tired of cherishing an old vain dream ; and I had thought it was better perhaps to accept fate as it came to me, and to cease trying to be anything different from just what other people about me are satisfied to be. I began to think, madame, I could manage to fill my heart with what wealth or position or worldly things could give me, if I could only get rid of theories and that old individual ideal. But I will not do it now, madame. I feel quite strongly again that there is a higher life ; and I will try to get rid of my own dreamy and tiresome self.”

“Dearest child, we know, none of us, what may lie before you in this bright young life of yours. God grant it may be every blessing. And now, good-bye. I hope to see your father to-morrow.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

WANDERERS

SIR JOHN GRAEME had an excellent habit of walking home every afternoon towards tea-time, nearly the whole way from Westminster.

This afternoon he was rather late. The lamps were already lit all round the lower region of the river, glittering strangely through the fog beyond Buckingham Gate and in a starry circle round the Green Park. All along Piccadilly, where the fog was falling dense and smoky, the flaring gas-lamps were struggling to live in the murky atmosphere, and there was a noisy rush of traffic hurrying to and fro.

"I hope both the girls are at home," was his reflection as he paused for a crossing at the top of Piccadilly, and looked up and down through the smoke and mist.

A moment, and the loud incessant stream of wagons, carriages, cabs, and hansoms coming in every one of the four directions, was arrested by the stentorian voice of the policeman ringing with peremptory authority through the fog, and Sir John stepped firmly and rapidly across. He reached the corner. There was a blaze of light here from the lamps over the gateway, and from the entrance to Apsley House; and there was a ceaseless stream of foot-passengers hurrying rapidly along. Sir John was impatient; he pushed forward, and, with an exclamation of mingled apology and disgust, fell right against a man head and shoulders taller than himself—a young man, who paused instantly, held out his arms to prevent Sir John flattening his nose upon the pavement, and murmured some words in responsive apology to the unfortunate baronet's ejaculatory remarks.

They both paused. Sir John looked up ; the brilliant lamp-light from above the archway streamed right upon the younger man's face. Sir John started.

"God bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "Piers Ashton—my dear boy!" and, with both hands extended, Sir John forgot his impatience and sprang forward again.

Piers seized his hands in both of his. He drew him aside a little just under the lamp-light out of the crowd, and they stood a second silent, their hands clasped warmly together, each pair of eyes searching eagerly the other's face. Some one else followed them also out of the stream of people, and stood silent, a little backward, by Piers Ashton's side ; another figure, young also, slight and agile-looking, about half Piers's breadth and height.

"My dear boy," Sir John continued, "I am delighted to see you!"

("Dence take Lady Curzon Kellam!" he mentally exclaimed ; "there is not a shadow of harm in that face.")

"God bless you, my dear boy!" he continued aloud. "I am uncommonly glad to see you again."

Piers's grave gaze of inquiry lit up at once.

"And I am delighted to see you," he said. "I have been hunting for you down at Westminster the whole day long."

"You have? Gad! and I have been shut up in those fusty committee-rooms since eleven o'clock."

"So they told me; and I would not disturb you. Then I heard that you lived in Prince's Gate, and I was going along to try my luck at finding you there."

"Capital! Then come away with me now: I am going straight home," Sir John answered with delighted eagerness; for in his warm heart, real affection for Piers had flooded already every recollection of suspicion or offence. "Come along;" and he loosed Piers's hand to lay his own upon his arm.

"But stop a moment," said Piers, suddenly re-

membering his companion—"stop ; first let me introduce to you my friend. Victor, this is Sir John Graeme. Uncle, this is my best friend—my dearest friend in the world ; I am sure you will like to know him."

Victor moved forward, and Sir John turned hastily round. A cloud had come over his face, and his lips contracted now with angry memories and suspicions. This was one of those confounded Frenchmen, full of every kind of dangerous, devilish mischief, who had ruined all Piers Ashton's career for him, and taken him to the bad.

Sir John turned stiffly round ; he looked up, and there,—just under the cluster of flaming lights, he saw that fair winning face, the light curling hair falling over his forehead as he removed his hat, the blue eyes sparkling in glad sympathy for his friend, his lips parted in a smile, earnest, deferential, and radiant, full of that wonderful sweetness that was Victor's irresistible charm.

Sir John looked up, and was silent a moment. The young man stood also silent, waiting for the elder to speak, bending still before him his uncovered head.

"Gad !" said Sir John at length, as he put his hand out, "you are *never* a Frenchman."

By which he testified that the prejudices of an elderly British are much the same as the prejudices of a young British mind, such as showed themselves at Cambridge in Piers Ashton years ago—the same, a little more obstinate and intensified.

"You are never a Frenchman !"

"Only half," said Victor laughing, as he took Sir John Graeme's hand.

"Half ?"

"Yes," he answered again ; "my mother was a Scotchwoman."

"God bless me ! Stop,—let me look at you again. I knew it—I knew it ; here, turn to the lamp-light.

"I'll bet a sovereign these are Campbell features, and a pair of blue Campbell eyes."

"I suppose they are," Victor went on with a bright smile again. "My mother was a Campbell of Ardsachy; perhaps you may know the name. My grandfather sold his property, and went to live at Fontainebleau about the year thirty-five."

"Of course, I knew it—I knew it—I remember perfectly. Why, Piers, Ardsachy Castle is not forty miles from the Old Towers. I remember your family distinctly. I warmed in a moment to that yellow hair and those Scotch blue eyes. There is not a bit of a Frenchman about you."

"A little, I hope," said Lescar, laughing again at the enthusiasm of Sir John's national prejudice.

"You hope so! What nonsense!—a man who can lay claim to the old blood of the Campbells of Ardsachy, my boy, need not go harking back to any French ancestors; I can tell you that. Come along; do not let us stand here. Come home with me at once. The girls are sure to be snug over their tea, you know, Piers; and Lady Kellam has gone to blow off the cobwebs at Brighton to-night—so it is capital. Come along."

And he turned round energetically, and walked between them, taking an arm of each.

Piers stopped him at the corner, however, before they passed beyond the influence of the cluster of lights.

"Wait a moment, sir—just one moment; please look at these."

And he drew a couple of letters from his pocket.

"Will you believe me when I say that I only received them into my hands last Saturday. They have lain for me all this time at the hotel in Paris."

"My dear boy, I understand—I understand. It is all right, Piers. I believe in you; I believe in you, my boy. I cannot look in your face and remember one of those confounded stories of——Bother! I must *not mention names*. But put up the letters. You will

tell me all about it by-and-by ; and evil reports and reporters may go to the devil. Come home with me, both of you ; we will have a cup of tea with my two little girls, and have all the news out together. Donna will be glad to see you."

The girls were both at home by this time, as their father had hoped in his mental soliloquy at Hyde Park Corner, when he had looked east and westward into the gathering fog.

Donna had driven straight back in their little brougham from Madame Prioleau's, and had come into the drawing-room to find Gaie seated in solitude on the rug, the tea-urn fizzing on the round table beside her, the room lighted by a warm glow from the huge fire, and Gaie indulging in that old wicked habit of her childhood—reading in the pleasant twilight, by nothing brighter than the flickering flames that danced merrily over her and over the pretty hangings of the room.

Donna had come in, had thrown aside her bonnet, and had sat down on her low favorite chair ; and Gaie had nestled close to her, with her head upon her sister's lap, and they had sat thus a long time.

Donna had wonderful things to tell Gaie of the visit of that afternoon—of Madame Prioleau and the sweet tenderness and sublime nobility of her character—of all the new thoughts and resolutions and grand schemes that had arisen in her mind as she listened to madame, and as she drove home in solitude and darkness.

And Gaie had heard, and answered, and sympathized,—her book lying neglected beside her, while her eyes became shadowy and full of dreamy thought as she gazed into the firelight, and the dancing reflection glistened and quivered in their beautiful violet depths. Then Gaie had sighed, as Donna's words seemed to sound the misty, abstract, infinite difficulties of her own mind, and as the visions of a distance, great and sublime, flitted before her with a strange

mystery of unknown possibilities and with suggestions of a future all unrevealed.

"Ah! Donna," she sighed, "I wish I were half as good as Madame Prioleau and you."

"My darling—*you!*" said Donna; and the answer, in the tender quiver of her voice, found no further expression in words; her fingers wandered quietly through the wavy "burnished gold," as Lady Kellam had called it, of Gaie's hair—"my darling."

They sank into silence then. These inspirations of Madame Prioleau seemed to touch within them a sphere of thought too mystic, too indefinite, to be expressed in words.

They sat on, and, presently, while Donna's thoughts followed their wonted habits, and unravelled themselves in silent energy, becoming gradually definite and clear, Gaie broke into her own method of reflection, as she always described it, and in a full, soft voice she began to sing. Donna listened: she always said Gaie's music helped her to think; she always declared Gaie's voice had a special language of its own in song. She listened and Gaie sang on.

Suddenly there was a sound in the hall, down stairs, the opening of the front door, and a loud bang as it swung back again. She paused an instant.

"Papa," Donna said, "he has come in with his latchkey."

And Gaie went on. Her father would be up here directly, she knew; but for him she need not still her song: it was,—next to the individuals, Donna and Gaie,—perhaps the thing he loved best on earth. She sang on, her voice swelling as she raised her head, the notes floating through the room and beyond it.

Suddenly she paused again. Her quick ear caught an unusual sound. Her father was speaking; and as he came up the softly carpeted stairs, there were voices mingling with his. She stopped, sprang to her feet, and glanced rapidly in inquiry and astonishment at

Donna, as her father, followed by two unexpected visitors, entered the room.

"Ah!" Sir John exclaimed. Donna, sitting on her low chair by the fireside, turned quickly round. "Just as I expected," her father was saying; but his words were unheard. She had risen to her feet, and the blood rushed over her face and then fled from it instantly, leaving her cheek deadly pale. But she stood quite still, and put out both her hands; and there was no time nor need of introduction or explanation, for Piers had sprung forward, had clasped her hands in both his, and was looking down with an eager, earnest expression of feeling upon his face.

"Donna!" Not another word could he say, and there was fortunately no need, for Sir John said all the rest.

"Ha! ha! I thought so; you are glad to see him again? Sunburnt fellow he is, isn't he? And here is little Gaie!" and he laughed brimful of merry gladness, as Piers turned, and with bright cordiality clasped Gaie's little proffered hands.

"How nice," she exclaimed instantly, "to see you again!"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Sir John again; "and here is somebody else, my dears; let me introduce you. This is a young countryman, a Scotchman, grandson of Campbell of Ardsachy, an old neighbor of ours: my daughters."

"This is Victor Lescar, Donna," Piers said in his turn; "my friend."

Victor smiled his sunny greeting, all the sunnier as it was in his gladness for his friend, and he shook hands with Donna. Then Gaie put her tiny fingers into his, and he held them a moment, and the smile with its merriment and radiance left his face. He paused a moment in silence; a sweet quivering light came into his eyes as they met hers in the firelight, and an expression quite new to him curled tenderly on his lips. He dropped her hand, said nothing; and then

he, as well as Piers, obeyed Sir John's hearty entreaty, and they all sat down.

"Now then, Donna, my dear," the old gentleman continued, stirring up the fire and bustling about, full of good humor and hospitality—"now then, let us have a cup of tea. I told them both we should just find you at it."

"I had my tea, two hours ago, with Madame Prioleau," said Donna, rising as her father spoke, and crossing over to her place by the little table; "but I shall be very glad to pour some out for everybody else;" and she bent over the tea-things.

"Was it not extraordinary? I had just crossed Piccadilly, and was bolting in at the corner there, and I ran right against them, straight into Piers's arms? Gad, I would have been down on my nose, if you had not caught me; and then I looked up in the gaslight, and there you were. Extraordinary!" So Sir John chattered on, while he took his cup of tea from Donna, and sat himself down in his huge chair at the other corner of the rug near the fire.

What a pleasant home-like scene it was! How long since—not during all his wanderings—had Piers seen one quite like it. The softly-colored luxuriant room, the warm fire-flames dancing over it making a glowing comfortable light; Gaie's golden head bending opposite to him on one side; Sir John's portly frame, so pleasant and familiar, ensconced in comfort between his daughters in his big chair; and then at the tea-table Donna, her fingers moving quickly among the glittering china and silver on the snowy tablecloth, and her graceful figure and dark-brown head bending low, as if very intent indeed upon her occupation.

The scene touched him with a feeling of its sweet and tranquil homeliness, its English comfort, its English refinement and quiet; and in that moment his heart had found time to contrast another scene he remembered, another face he had lately seen; and the *sense of contrast* was pleasant to him.

He rose and approached Donna at last, to take Gaie's teacup from her hand ; and when he had crossed the rug with it, he returned again.

"You have been to tea, then, with Madame Prioleau ; eh, Donna ?" said Sir John.

"Yes, papa."

"You did go to see Madame Prioleau then to-day," said Piers. "She told me she expected you."

"Told you ? Do you know her ?"

"I should think we do !" he answered. "Victor, we know Madame Prioleau a little, do we not ?"

"I have known her a very long time," said Victor, speaking in a low voice, and with a curious absent manner not quite like himself.

"And I know her well, though I have not known her very long," said Piers.

"And I have known her but a very, very little while," said Donna ; "but I feel as if I had known her all my life."

"Is it not curious ? It is just what one does feel," said Piers, "after one single talk with Madame Prioleau."

"My old friend seems to have developed into a very charming woman," said Sir John. "I must go and see her."

"Oh yes, papa, I told her you would go to-morrow."

"You have known her, as papa has, for a long time then ?" said Gaie, addressing Victor.

He had sat down near her, and his eyes were wandering absently from the glowing fire to her face, as she leaned back in the shadow.

"Yes, since I was quite a boy," he answered.

Then he was silent again—curiously silent and unresponsive for him.

Then Sir John said something more, and Piers and Donna turned from the tea-table and joined in his remarks ; and Victor, while their tones resounded on the other side of the fireplace, bent forward and said

o Gaie in a low voice, "Why did you stop singing just as we came in?"

She looked up at him with a bright, amused smile.

"How do you know it was I?"

"I have not the slightest doubt of it."

Gaie had dropped on to a low stool at the corner of the fireplace when they all came in, and she had sat back in the shadow; but she bent forward now into the fire-glow, leaned her soft cheek on her hand, and looked up at him with a mischievous merry light in her eyes.

"How do you know Donna does not sing?"

"I do not know that she does not sing," he answered.

"Then how do you know it was not she who sang as you came upstairs?"

"Because," he replied emphatically, "I know it was you."

"But how can you?"

"Perhaps because I sing myself," he said with a sudden thoughtfulness. "Can you understand these things?—I cannot. I heard your voice before my foot was on the lowest step of the stairs. Piers and Sir John were speaking to each other," he went on in a curiously earnest tone, as if he felt the whole narrative and explanation were due to her; "they were talking the whole time, but I do not know what they said—I never heard one word; but I heard your voice, every note of it. You were singing from the 'Orfeo,' were you not—'Che farò senza Eurydice?' And I looked round the room the instant I entered, and I knew which voice had sung. Will you not believe me?"

"Well, there were not many to choose from," she answered thoughtfully, with a gravity as curious as his own; "you could not go very far wrong in your guess."

"I think," he replied, "I should have known it just the same, if there had been twenty instead of two people in the room."

She did not answer again ; she turned her face away a little, and looked, as he had done, into the glowing fire ; and as she turned away, he rested his eyes upon her, thinking how bright she was, how lovely. She seemed very beautiful to him, her golden hair glistening in the light, her figure bending in the shadow, her eyes full of soft wandering thought, their dark lashes falling over the delicately tinted cheek.

Victor was silent ; and as he sat there, and looked at her, he realized with the quick electric sensibility of his nature—in that sweet transient moment he realized something instantly, suddenly, concerning himself and her.

“Will you sing to me again ?” he asked.

“How absurd ! No, I could not,” she answered, smiling. “Why, they are all talking ; and I never sing without accompaniment, except when Donna and I are quite alone.”

“But another time ?”

“Another time, perhaps,” she continued, “if you care about it. But I dare say you yourself sing ten times better than I.”

“Oh no, a man’s singing is nothing.”

“Why, I think just the opposite. I—” she began ; but Piers, overhearing their last remarks, interrupted her from the other side.

“Are you asking Victor about his singing, Gaie ? Oh, you must hear him,” he said proudly ; for he was anxious to show off without any delay the perfections of his beloved friend.

“I want to hear Miss Graeme again,” answered Victor.

“Donna ?” Piers continued inquiringly, “I did not remember that you sang.”

“No ; Gaie does.”

“Ah !” Piers was beginning ; but Victor interrupted, in his turn, with reproachful eagerness.

“Did you not hear,” he exclaimed, “as we came upstairs ?”

"No," said Piers ; "I did not hear any singing."

"Dear ! dear !" said Victor ; "imagine being born without a musical pair of ears."

"I do not think that Piers's musical susceptibilities were ever very acute," said Donna, laughing.

"Acute in the wrong direction," said Victor. "I used to make his life a burden to him at Cambridge ; but, indeed, he is improved."

"The valuable influence of musical companionship, you see, Vic. Well, I will revenge myself for all the songs with which you have inflicted me during all these years, by insisting that you comply with Gaie's request and sing to us now."

"She did not request me to sing, *mon ami* ; you did it for her."

"At all events, we more than request now," said Donna. "Will you sing ? We should like it so much. This, of all the hours of the day, is, in my opinion, the most suggestive of music."

"Besides, I did request you," put in Gaie ; "and now, as Donna says, more than *request*—I insist."

"Do you really wish it ?" he asked, turning earnestly towards her. "I want so much to hear you again. You stopped just at that last delicious change in the melody. I wish you would finish it."

"After you have sung, perhaps I may. There, do not keep us waiting," she added, with a pretty little petulant assertion of dignity. "The piano is just behind the curtain hanging in that arch ; you have only to push it back a little. Go."

"If you command me, I will," he said ; "if you command me."

"Certainly I do."

"*Bien !*" and he rose and crossed the room to where the velvet curtain hanging over the archway separated them from the larger apartment. He pushed it back, as she had told him. Beyond was a vista of dusky shadow, the fire-glow scarcely penetrating the length of the lofty room.

"Can I help you?" said Piers, moving round in his chair.

"No; it is all right. Here is the piano in a charming twilight corner. How perfect for veiling the blushes of a modest performer!"

"But will you not light the candles?" said Donna.
"Stop; I will ring."

"No, no, please do not; I like the dark here much the best. Miss Graeme, do you know these words?" and he sat down, leaving to discretion the choice of which Miss Graeme he was addressing, and struck a few chords, improvising his accompaniment in his own favorite way.

He played a few bars softly, and then in his sweet rich tones he sang the same old words of years ago, with which he had teased Piers so much one evening at Cambridge—

"Where and how shall I earliest meet her?
What are the words she first shall say?
By what name shall I learn to greet her?
I know not now,—it will come some day.

"With the self-same sunlight shining upon her,
Shining down on her ringlets' sheen,
She is standing somewhere—her whom I honor,
She whom I wait for—my Queen, my Queen."

He sang the whole lovely song to the same music—that same setting of his own, to which he had sung it to Piers that evening at Cambridge; and Piers listened, and remembered that long-ago night, and wondered why Victor chose to sing that particular song on this occasion now, and what had made him remember it, for—in all these years since that one evening, he had never sung it again to him—until now!

Victor's voice ceased; a few beautiful chords followed the ring of tenderness with which he had uttered the last lines, the soft eager intonation of the

words, "My Queen—my Queen," and then he took his fingers from the piano, and the sound quite ceased.

"Thank you so much. No, please *do* not come back here again : we want some more," said Donna.

He laughed with a slight echo of pleasure in his voice.

"I like the words," said Piers, solemnly.

"Do you?" said Victor, laughing still. "A thousand congratulations, my friend."

"I know what you mean," Piers retorted, with a touch of his old shy dislike to being rallied in his tone.

"Blumenthal has adapted 'My Queen,'" said Gaie. "Do you know his setting?"

"No, I do not," he answered, rising from the piano as he spoke. "But you do : it is your turn now ; will you come and sing it?"

"If you like—yes ; but the same words, you know."

"We cannot have them too often," he answered, as she approached him ; and he pushed the curtain further back to give her more room. "And we shall have them with real music this time. I ought to apologize for inflicting my own compositions upon you."

"I liked it," Gaie said ; and she sat down.

She let her fingers wander over the notes in her turn, awakening them with an intensely sympathetic touch. At the first note Victor said no more. He dropped into a seat near her in the shadow of the large darkened room, and was silent.

He listened and watched her as she sang, her beautiful notes thrilling him with a sweet mysterious power, caught from the new wonderful life that had sprung up so suddenly in his heart ; her loveliness, so childlike and delicate, filling him with unspeakable tenderness, as he sat by her in the dusky room, and the soft glow from beyond the velvet curtain wrapped her figure in shadowy lights.

Meanwhile Sir John and Piers and Donna chatted pleasantly together by the fireside, leaving the two

musical enthusiasts to the enjoyment of each other and of themselves.

By the fireside, as by the piano, everybody found it very pleasant. Sir John left his letters unopened, and never rang for his lamp; he contented himself by replenishing the fire with energetic enthusiasm from time to time, keeping up that continuous cheery blaze; and he sat with his toes extended in front of it, and listened with genuine satisfaction to the intelligent answers and graphic descriptions which Piers Ashton was ready to give him, in reply to his inquiries, upon many countries and many things.

They all enjoyed the long quiet talk; and everybody was sorry when the hour rang forth from the clock on the mantelpiece, and the dressing-gong sounded through the house.

"Gad!" said Sir John, springing up, "I never thought it was so late. Of course, you will both stay to dinner?"

"Impossible, I fear," Piers said.

And then the music ceased suddenly at the sound of the gong; and Victor and Gaie came forward from the shadowy duskiness of the other room.

"Victor, can we stay?"

"Thank you," said Victor, looking wistfully at Sir John, "I should like it very much; but, I fear, this evening we cannot. We have already an engagement."

"Well, well; all right. Just as it suits yourselves. Let me see, Donna; are we going anywhere to-morrow?"

"Sir Robert Carre and Aunt Kellam dine here, papa."

"Do they?—the deuce! Well, that will do, though; we will all be at home. You will come and dine to-morrow, then, both of you; eh?"

"With pleasure," said Victor, readily.

"I should like it immensely," said Piers.

"Very well; that will do capitally. I shall enjoy

hearing some more of your traveller's tales, Piers. You have made good use, my boy, of your eyes and ears. Good-bye, then, till to-morrow."

Victor had Gaie's fingers between his for an instant, and—remembering he was in England—resisted his Frenchman's instinct to raise them to his lips. And Donna shook hands with Piers, she feeling still more than half in a dream, as his strong clasp closed over hers with eager warmth, and his dark eyes, full of earnest expression, sought her face.

They had exchanged very few words. Sir John had been the chief talker, as was often his wont; and his conversation had consisted chiefly in a string of inquiries bearing directly upon Piers's travels and his life.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CONNECTINGLY DIGRESSIVE.

It had been a curious wandering life during these three years since the two friends had left Paris. The mission they had undertaken led them to strange corners of the world. The experiences they encountered gave them many a lesson in life.

When the two friends had returned from their distant wanderings, and passed through Paris, they found all their old friends in a maddened frenzy of excitement over that famous and pregnant catastrophe in the history of the Napoleons—the death of the journalist, Victor Noir, and the trial of Pierre Bonaparte.

In the Place St. Etienne they had found a whirlpool of violent speech, which it was impossible to regard otherwise than with repugnance and contempt. *Enthusiasm, bereft of reason, of moderation, and of*

all power of judgment, had already become the raving fanaticism of fools.

The times were ominous ; the future unknown.

And there in the Place St. Etienne was Faustine, fanning with frantic persistency these dangerous fires, her beauty still glorious, her eyes still dark and flashing, her form still graceful as a classic statue, as an Eastern queen.

But, strange to say, to men other than these wild agitators who formed her court, her attractions were now almost gone. Those occasional gleams of sweetness, that once made her eyes bewitching, had given place entirely to angry flashes, speaking the dark side of her character and the bitterness of her heart. There was no softness in her voice now, save towards the old grandfather, no tenderness in her spirit or on her tongue.

Faustine—the wild daughter of the Marseillaise—she inspired still admiration, wonder, almost awe. But when Piers came to Paris and saw her again, he felt the lesson her grand beauty had once taught his heart concerning its own existence was a lesson of the past ; from her it could never be learnt again. The idealistic, beautiful sphere, which Victor in his chivalrous dreams had taught him to ascribe to woman, found no longer its realization in the presence of Faustine ; and the old boyish passionate admiration for her had no existence in his matured character now. His judgment, and his taste, revolted alike from her conduct and her use of power.

He turned his steps gladly from Paris when Victor received the mission to the London centre, and he obeyed at length with a feeling of intense pleasure the strong impulse that had been long existing in his heart—the wish to return home. He was Faustine's plighted friend, he told himself, *for ever*, should she require him ; but, meantime, he must go home to England, to Pollingworth to old associations and to old friends.

Paris seemed no longer the place for him. Indeed, all Paris was in a strange and mysterious state.

How little men thought in these days how much of what was described as "Paris" emanated from London!

How little men knew of such scenes as that to which the duties of their mission led Victor, and Piers with him, a few hours later on that same evening, of which they had spent the beginning so pleasantly in Prince's Gate!

Perhaps Sir John would not have treated this prodigal Bohemian ward of his with so much leniency, had he possessed the remotest notion of the nature of that engagement to which the two young men were bound,—could he have seen Piers, and realized the society in which he was seated,—could he have believed his eyes when the sunny, smiling troubadour, Victor, rose in that assembly to speak.

It is true, there is a corner in London where they have much to answer for, in the troubles of France. There were groups of dark-faced men in those days in the grimy precincts of Leicester Square, Holborn, and Percy Street, Soho, from which the centres of the Route du Chêne in Geneva and the Rue de Gravilliers in Paris drew much of their strength and encouragement.

There were there—the old republican exiles whom Fribourg has called "the fathers of Jacobinism." They looked with disdain on all Universalists as on teachers of mere visionary enthusiasm.

There were there—the English malcontents, of every color.

There were the German master-minds,—Karl Franx, grim, observant, silent; sometimes Lind Reirigrath and others. There was excitement, kindling and effective, but, among these latter names, always careful and circumspect.

The mind wearies, as we turn again and again to

reiterate the doctrines, false and delusive, of these dreamers, these writers of fiery articles, and speakers of fiery speech ; as we trace again the theories of the Socialist, the Republican, the Universalist, the Reformer, as they were all represented in the gatherings in Percy Street, Soho.

There was some excuse, perhaps, for these exiles. They were often maddened by that passionate love and longing for home and country which, as Sidney expresses it, "dims the vision, and distracts the brain."

There was something to be said for the Germans who had abandoned all sense of Fatherland, who had embraced really the cosmopolitan nationality they preached ; to whom their own strange Socialistic theories had become dearer than country, nation, or home ; who had renounced patriotic sentiment, and were avowedly abstract and universal in their philosophy and their schemes.

But for the Englishmen in that room—? that they were blind, confused, and deluded, as Piers Ashton had been, is the best that can be said in their defence ; and this would be said hopefully, and said in confidence, were they really nerved with philanthropic zeal—really eager for human good—were there Frederick Thellussons among them, ready to pour out their lives in national causes truly useful—ready to give their energies and to forget—*themselves*. Were there indeed any such heroes among them, we should not fear for them, or—for our country through their deeds.

Would that men did agitate to talk of these things ; would that there were many brave, earnest and devoted,—revolutionists against some conditions that be—men young and vigorous, to come to the front as politicians, as philanthropists, strong in their heroic love of their nation and their fellow-men ! We want men like these ; we want pioneers to the depths of our darkness—pioneers through the tangled mazes of political and social truth.

But we want them genuine ; we want them unselfish, sober, and dealers with facts—not dreamers of dreams. We want, certainly, agitators ; apathy is our deadliest foe.

“ Why troublest thou the night with thy cries ? ” said the demi-gods to Prometheus.

“ Why stir up the people to discontent ? ” is the answer often to the platform, the pulpit, or the press.

Let the night be troubled, for it is night ; let the darkness be rent with cries for the day, and let philanthropists agitate till more, and far more, is done to help our fellow-man. In all things, let us advance, let us reform, let us agitate, but—in truth.

Among the many false theories, is there none true ? There is so much delusion, so much empty theory, impracticable and useless, the mind turns wearily from all this futile Utopianism, and refuses to trace it again.

It is much pleasanter now to pass over that noisy night in Percy Street, to leave Piers to relate impressions of its experience presently to a sympathetic ear, to let him describe at the same time the events of the next morning and afternoon, and to turn to the twilight hour before dinner, when he and Victor found themselves again in the drawing-room at Prince's Gate.

As the two friends were shown into the room, they realized that there were additions to the fireside party since the night before, and that Donna and Gaie were attired in evening dress—Gaie in some white material, in which she looked more like a May rose than ever, and Donna in the soft shady color that suited her so well.

A large portentous lady sat on one side, arrayed with much magnificence in a gown and decorations evidently beyond the requirement of the present occasion. Lady Kellam had more than one evening engagement, and was “ going on.”

She returned Piers and Victor's obeisance, on their introduction, with some reserve. She turned her

back on Victor immediately ; but she surveyed Piers with a critical and considerate eye.

"How do you do, Mr. Ashton ? I ought to know you, I think. I remember your poor father well."

She gave him the tips of two fingers, and watched him still, while Sir John wheeled him round by a hand on his shoulder, and presented him to Sir Robert Carre.

"Ah, come back from your travels ? Had enough of it, eh ?" said Sir Robert, as he shook hands with the young man, and put up his eye-glass to stare into the dark face.

"I do not know," said Piers. "Travelling about the world is an occupation more apt to grow upon a man than to tire him out."

"Ah, well," Sir Robert was beginning to reply, as Victor turned to shake hands with Gaie, and Lady Kellam addressed a remark to Donna and Sir John : but they were all interrupted, the door opened again, and the servant announced "Madame Prioleau."

"Ah !" exclaimed Sir John, hurrying forward to clasp her hand. "I am so rejoiced, my dear madame. Donna, you see my visit was not in vain."

"I found I could get away," replied Madame Prioleau ; "the meeting was over early. I could not resist the temptation of your kindness. I have deserted all duties, and here I am. There were so many dear friends to meet," she continued, turning to the group of the four young people, as they stood together by the fire. "I am so glad to see you all again," she added, as she gave a hand, one by one, to each.

"Madame Prioleau," said Sir John presently, "my sister-in-law, Lady Curzon Kellam ; Sir Robert Carre."

"Madame Prioleau and I have been introduced already," said Lady Kellam, as she rose and came forward with a polite smile. She hated "out-of-the-way people"—unconventional women and persons with individual and eccentric careers ; and under other circumstances Madame Prioleau would have received the coldest welcome to her acquaintance. But, just at

hat moment in London, Madame Prioleau was threatening to become the fashion; London was talking about her. The Duchess of Athelstone called her "her dearest friend."

In the meantime she was certainly the fashion. Lady Kellam tossed her head over it and said, "Wonderful people did get into society in these days;" but she was very civil to Madame Prioleau.

Then they all went down to dinner. Sir John carried off his old friend with evident enjoyment. Lady Kellam, as hostess and chaperon, had, of course, to appropriate Sir Robert; and with extreme dissatisfaction she was obliged to survey her two nieces preceding her down the staircase, Donna leaning on Piers Ashton's arm, and Gaie laughing and chattering merrily to Victor.

"This is a curious contrast," said Piers to Madame Prioleau, as he took his seat between her and Donna, "to the scene in which we last dined together."

"Ah yes; to be sure, I remember—at dear old Madame d'Alnigni's."

"Yes; the week before Victor and I left Paris."

"Certainly, a different scene; that quaint little French dining-room. We are contrasting," she continued to Donna, "your stately English room here, with the apartment where Mr. Ashton and I last dined in company—a tiny *étage* in the Place Vendôme."

"I dare say it was much prettier," said Donna.

"Different, quite. Equally pretty, in its way," said Piers, glancing round Sir John's handsome dining-room, and over the table glistening with crystal, covered with fine old Worcester china and stately old pieces of plate. "I think nations keep up their characteristics in their dinner-tables as much as in anything else. But I was remembering, at that moment, more especially, the people. Madame d'Alnigni and Lady Kellam might sit as contrasts, representative of their national types; Sir Robert and Regnau—no parallel whatever there."

"Nor here," said Madame Prioleau, turning slightly towards Donna, with her winning smile.

Piers followed her gaze on to Donna's face, and her thought also.

"No parallel," he said, "but a clearly defined contrast comes out very strongly."

"With whom are you comparing me?" said Donna, coloring and laughing as they both spoke.

"Not comparing—contrasting," said Piers, smiling. "We were only carrying out recollections of that dinner. You and Gaie, you see, are the counterpoints of Faustine Dax."

Then Sir John claimed Madame Prioleau's attention, and Piers went on.

"I wish you could have known Faustine; she would have interested you. She was Victor's friend, you know; they were almost brought up together. I wish you could know a great many of those people I used to see over there; they were such curious studies of a very strange side of life."

"I often wish," said Donna, "I knew more of the people you like to live among; I think I might understand then better about your aims and your life."

"I do not think you would," he answered; "I seem to understand them so badly myself."

"Tell me about it," she said in a lowered tone, "as you used to tell me long ago."

"I have so little I can tell," he replied, "except about places where I have been, and people I have seen; the rest, the theory of it all and the object, seems still confusion."

"Is it always to be so?" she murmured.

"I often ask that question of myself," he replied, a little sadly. "If the answer is to be in the affirmative, my life will be a failure indeed."

"Are your objects and your friend's objects still the same?" she continued. "Do you think just as you did when you wrote that last letter to papa?"

"No, not in the least the same; nor does he."

cannot tell you much about it now," he answered, "because I should have to use names and words that would attract attention and make people listen; and ours is not a cause that can be discussed in ordinary society of this kind. But I should like to tell you—and there is a great deal I might describe without transgressing any confidence whatever; and, Donna, it used to be very pleasant long ago, when we talked over everything together."

"Yes, I lost my only brother when you took yourself away."

"I had to do it," he said. "When it once takes hold of a man to know, to understand, to dive into the mysteries and difficulties of things, he must go on—on—till he comes to the end of it, cost him what it may."

"But I think if a man has people who care about him, and who are just the same as a father and sisters to him,—interested in all his ideas," said Donna, "he need not run away quite so entirely from them, even when he wants to find out about 'everything,' as you say. I think brothers should go on talking to their sisters, Piers, when they have been brought up with them."

"I do not think," he answered, with a curious dissatisfaction in his tone, "that brothers and sisters do talk together about everything, as you and I used to do, Donna."

"Oh, I am sure they do. At least, I used to long so for a brother when I was quite young, before you ever came, Piers; and then you were just to me what I used to fancy a brother would be, and I never felt I had not a real one after that first year. You were exactly like a brother to me."

"Was I?" he said discontentedly. "I do not think it is quite the same."

And he became reflective for a moment, and then he would have spoken again, but Sir Robert Carré was on Donna's other side, and at that moment asserted himself and joined the conversation.

Lady Kellam helped him, and she took care it should not become a *tête-à-tête* again.

After dinner that lady's mind was most perturbed. She must "go on;" she was due at Mrs. Carrington Smythe's reception, and so was Sir Robert; and she had no card for the two girls. They were to stay at home this evening, and too provoking it was.

The time came at last; her carriage was announced; she owed a duty to herself as well as to her nieces, and Mrs. Carrington Smythe's "at homes" were never to be despised: so she departed, and soon after Sir Robert bowed himself away.

Sir Robert was not in the least in love, so *he* was by no means uncomfortable. He had certainly made up his mind that the "dark-haired Miss Graeme would make a suitable Lady Carre;" but he had no anxiety on the subject, for Lady Kellam, he felt satisfied, would arrange it all. She understood the kind of thing, and would help him into this appropriate matrimony without allowing the affair to bore him. He intended to propose to Donna before the season was over, but the intention by no means disturbed the equanimity of his mind. He followed Lady Kellam to Mrs. Carrington Smythe's house in Grosvenor Gardens, and was just in time to give her his arm, as she squeezed up the crowded staircase, and to express his polite regrets that they had left her charming nieces behind.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

EINHEIT.

MEANTIME, by that moment, in Prince's Gate it was much as Lady Kellam had feared. Sir John and Madame Prioleau, in two large chairs on one side the

replace, sat on, talking in tones of friendly interest of times of long ago. The notes of the piano came sweetly from beyond the archway, mingled sometimes with Victor's soft tenor, sometimes with the clear ring of Gaie's fresh young tones—in German, French, Italian, English. The two musicians were enjoying their own special existence again in their own way ; and on a low centre ottoman sat Piers and Donna, her brown head bent over a bit of work that occupied her fingers, and helped her to compose the eager sympathy in her grey eyes ; he, leaning towards her, his face lit up with earnest expression as he spoke, his glance kindling often as he raised it for answers or appreciation to hers.

"How that old bore interrupted our conversation at dinner !" was his first remark, as he sat down after the door was well closed on Lady Kellam and Sir Robert.

"Yes ; did he not ? Go on, Piers, just where you were."

"I have often wished," he said, "in all these years, that I could talk to you. Things have changed so much in one's mind as life has gone on."

"Of course they have ; but tell me clearly."

"About the Universal, you mean ? You see, I never became a member ; they would not have me at first, and latterly I ceased to wish it. You know, the dream faded and died of that wonderful love and brotherhood we used to think would unite all classes of men. We see it now ; it is impossible."

"And what has come instead ?"

"It is difficult to tell you. Government must do it all ; it is a politician's work. When I see my way quite clear, I mean to take up politics really now."

"You mean to stand for Pollingworth, as papa used to wish so much long ago ?"

"Perhaps Pollingworth would not have me. I should have to stand on the extreme Radical side, and Pollingworth always returned a moderate Liberal."

"Papa says Pollingworth becomes more Radical every day," said Donna.

"Yes, so he told me to-night after dinner ; so perhaps I may suit them in time. But I do not quite like the English idea of Radicalism and reform, after all, Donna : I am not sure that I care to take it up."

"It will be time soon that you take up something decisively, Piers. You have gone on being doubtful so many years."

"Yes, I know I have ; it is terrible," he answered : "but I do not think I am an uncommon case. Of course I dare say you despise me because I am changeable and undecided, and always looking at questions on every side ; but I cannot help that ; it is my character and my difficulty, and I am sure it is so with many men. There are so many sides to every question one hears raised, and I have never yet found quite the one into which I can completely throw myself."

"You mean questions of doing good ?"

"Questions of politics and government and individual career, that is what I mean. Lots of fellows want to give themselves to the right way, if they could only see what is best to be done. I used to think it all easy when I first began, and that it only wanted energy and determination in some one to lead on ; but now I see possible results on all sides quite opposite to what we really desire, and I see that men whom we have admired and looked to, and followed in their opinions and ideas, do not really care about the good of the people in the very least, but are simply making noisy speeches against other men, who are, in point of fact, living and acting just as they do themselves. For instance, I heard speeches last night such as some years ago would have fired me with enthusiasm, with republicanism, and every sort of democratic idea."

"And they do not fire you now, Piers ?"

"I am *disillusioné* about it all—about the nobility of their schemes and the reality of their aspirations. I have been so utterly disappointed over and over again.

I think I know but one philanthropist who acts out his philanthropy, and one patriot who has lived out his ideal."

"You mean your friend Mr. Thellusson, Piers? What a grand life his seems to be. Did you see the *Times* article on his works a few weeks ago?"

"Yes; an old schoolfellow of his and mine sent it to me. He deserves it all. Yes, it is a grand life. I call him a real philanthropist; he lives what he speaks. You must know him, Donna. I will bring him to see you."

"Have you been down to the city to visit him since you arrived?"

"Yes; I spent all to-day with him, and I cannot tell you how refreshing it was, after the vague speechifying we had last night about philanthropy and patriotism, and freedom and glory, to find one man who was *doing* something. I often thought of him and his letters and theories during many a day in Paris, and in different parts of the world, where I have heard men of Raoul Regnau's type hold forth. Frederick seems such a contrast to that school. He never speechifies or makes absurd sensations, but goes on devoting simply *himself*, in that quiet glorious way of his."

"How I do like to hear you talk about it all, Piers! but—but you *must* not stop at talking. I long to see you doing, as well as others. I long to see you taking the place that should be yours in your own land. I cannot bear to see the years passing and passing away, and you still only dreaming and theorizing. Indeed, indeed, it is time you began to do. How curious it seems," she added, with a sweet happy smile—"how curious it seems that I should be listening to you, Piers, and scolding you just as I used to do years ago."

"It seems very pleasant."

"It is very good of you to allow me, when, after all, you know much better about it all than I do."

"No, I do not. I have gone through so much experience of contending influence that I have weakened in many of my theories. You have wonderfully strengthened in yours, Donna."

"Music has that influence over me more than anything else," said Donna suddenly.

They had been silent after the last few sentences, and she was looking up with a thoughtful expression, listening to Victor's voice coming in full, enthusiastic, vigorous notes from the other room.

"Ah! *that* kind of music has it for me," said Piers.

"What is it he is singing?" she asked.

"German—a national song, is it not?"

Victor and Gaie had wandered into national music and his old favorite German songs, echoes of those days of his boyhood spent in admiration of Arndt and Körner on the Rhine. He was singing the "Fatherland."

And they were silent once more, as Victor's voice reached them, in another of his beloved German songs, an Arndt, an Uhland, or a Becker—echoes all from those spirits of Germany who sang in the years before the battle of Leipsic—the times, as Körner has said, "that demanded great hearts, and for which great hearts were there."

He finished with Körner's own wondrous soldier's song, the prayer that had burst from the young poet-hero's lips, in the very heat of the conflict, beginning, "Father, on Thee I call," and going on through the verses to the last—

"God, I acknowledge Thee :

So when the autumn leaves rustle around me,

So when the thunders of battle surround me,

Fountain of grace, I acknowledge Thee.

Ach! Father, bless!"

Songs composed and sung then, as later, against France—songs Victor had learnt to love and appre-

ciate through many a day spent in their worship, in that atmosphere of music and Beethoven at Bonn.

"What has set you off on German patriotism?" said Piers, as, after the last song, Victor and Gaie came in through the archway.

"You speak of Germany as of a second fatherland."

"A third rather ; my life has been so cosmopolitan. France is my fatherland ; Germany my school ; England—Alma Mater—my university. I love them all."

"But France——" said Gaie. She paused, the question unspoken.

"Ah, France !" he replied, with a ring of tender pathos in his tone. "France—is my childhood's home. I think the passionate love with which the sons of her soil regard her—beautiful, wayward, unsteadfast France—is a different and a wonderful thing. France is our beloved, our mistress, our queen. The feeling with which we would give our heart's blood for her is something quite apart from the deep solemnity of the German enthusiasm or English national pride."

"You reverence Germany ; you deign to appreciate England——" said Gaie, laughing.

"And I would *die* for France ; that is just it," he said, smiling, in answer to her words. "Piers, is it not late? Have you not had enough of us, Miss Graeme, and of our music and patriotism?"

"Not too much," Donna answered, as she rose to take his hand. "Good night ; we shall see you again soon, shall we not? Papa, Piers and Monsieur Lescar are going."

There is nothing, I think, so injured by an effort at its description as—the process of falling in love.

I am not going to trace the consecutive stages of feeling through which Victor and Gaie passed during the next few weeks. Nor will I endeavor to analyze the true source of those curious accidents of circumstance by which Piers and Victor both found them-

selves impelled to arrive at Prince's Gate at least once every day.

It came so naturally ; the spring of sympathy in the two younger characters was so spontaneous, so unalloyed, and so complete, that it grew rapidly into life and power with little actual conscious recognition on either side. From the first evening they met there never seemed to be any question either in Victor's mind or in Gaie's : they belonged to each other as completely as the piano, and Heine's sonnets, and Schumann's reveries belonged to both.

The quiet friendship between Donna and Piers was of another kind. It was of older date ; it was but taking up the broken links of a "long ago"—a pleasant thing to do, an enjoyment full of deep interest and significance, and one it is the lot of few in this life to enjoy, unalloyed by bitter memories, untarnished by regretful tears. It was an earnest and intense enjoyment to both of them.

To Gaie and Victor there seemed a new sun in the heavens, a new verdure on the earth ! over the whole world of external and inner existence there was shed for their eyes a mystery new and beautiful, a radiance that made life at once a precious, a tender, and a holy thing.

Victor had found his "Queen."

CHAPTER XXXV.

BEFORE THE STORM.

THE season was drawing to its close—a brilliant season, which, to Victor and Piers, Donna and Gaie, had appeared the very sunniest summer of their lives.

And the Graemes were talking of a return to Scotland, and of the visit Piers and Victor were to pay them as the autumn went on.

Piers, under a new sense of duty, aroused by Donna's influence, was going first to Pollingworth, where she had assured him he would find much to do ; and Victor was to go over to Paris, to visit old Père Dax, who was ailing, to see Faustine, and to perform various mysterious duties for his perplexing calling and weary cause ; and then late in August he too would accept Sir John's cordial invitation, and go to the Old Towers.

Sir John felt it required nothing but a thorough understanding on all sides to get both the friends well rid of whatever "antipathetic" nonsense remained in their minds. About Piers he had no longer any doubt or misgiving ; and as to Victor, it seemed to him that a quiet time at the Old Towers, a month's grouse-shooting, a few long stalks over Crag Earen after the red deer, a visit to the old home of his Campbell ancestry, and other little pleasant influences besides, would make a thorough Scotchman for ever of him, and justify Sir John in his own eyes for the indulgence of this fancy of his for the young Frenchman, and the sense of irresistible attraction that actuated his tacit choice of a son-in-law. He liked the two lads ; he confessed it.

This autumn in Scotland promised surely bright days for them all—so they planned in early July.

Then came these ominous messages from France, expostulations from the British Government, and the refusal by France and Prussia of any conciliatory interference from foreign Powers.

Fiery letters came from Paris to Victor, from Raoul, from Rochecarre, from Faustine, from Tolberg.

They were so happy at Prince's Gate, so full of life, of hope, of joy ; and the news came threatening and ominous, awakening deepest anxiety, causing excitement thrilling and intense. A few days, just then, sufficed to change the current of every thought, to flood the prospect of their whole future with a new and unexpected light.

For a little while, things remained merely threatening, and people drew their breath, and paused. Victor paused like the rest, uncertain between two paths for a moment, an impulse driving him instantly to Paris, a new power, strong, urgent and passionate, binding him to London. He paused.

Meanwhile, before the season drew to its close, Lady Kellam decreed that Sir John Graeme should give a ball. It was no more than his duty, she said.

So it was all arranged ; and while Victor and his friends, in England and abroad, were watching with breathless anxiety the turn of impending events, Lady Kellam was placidly superintending the issue of those endless and important cards that announced Sir John Graeme and Lady Kellam "at home" on the 15th.

Victor spent many nights, at this time, in those haunts about Leicester Square and Soho, where the growlings of the war-lion were angry, excited and loud ; and he often shook his head as he talked to Piers afterwards, and sighed.

"I do not like it," he would repeat ; "I do not like the spirit of the whole thing. They have not got hold of the right end of the cable amongst them yet. There will be mischief out of all this some day."

Victor had been long in Germany ; and he shook his head too, sometimes, when those early bursts of enthusiasm for war and victory rose in cries of "À Berlin !" from every Frenchman's lips.

So events hurried on, and so there drew near the day when war was declared between France and Germany, and—the evening of Lady Kellam's ball.

On the morning of that day, the two friends came to Prince's Gate, only to say, however, that the early telegram had brought no fresh news. The house was all upside down, the large drawing-room cleared for dancing, Donna's round-room prettily decorated with flowers and arranged for tête-à-têtes and chaperones, the piano gone from Victor and Gais's favorite corner,

the violet curtain thrown back, and the archway gaily festooned.

The house, Victor said, did not look like itself. Lady Kellam had been there already this morning, to give her last directions, and to see that every arrangement had been properly carried out.

Among other things bearing directly upon the evening, she had had interviews with both her nieces on the subjects respectively of young Lord Dorringbroke and Sir Robert Carre. Both were to be present that night; and Lady Kellam called the two girls separately to the boudoir, and discoursed to them in turns with an elegance and pathos worthy of a better cause.

She loftily ignored the existence of Piers and Victor, and touched tenderly on the feelings of Sir Robert and Lord Dorringbroke, as if *their* happiness was her most sacred interest and her first concern.

"It is really wrong," she had said to both her nieces, "trifling in this sort of way, and throwing away, my dears, your precious prospects in life."

And the girls had said—nothing. Both felt strongly, but neither felt certain how much she was yet entitled to say. Piers and Victor had come, and come through all this bright happy summer; and somehow to both the sisters it seemed that they all belonged entirely to each other, without question—without need of words; and the idea of any one else coming for a moment between them seemed absurd and impossible. But still neither Victor nor Piers had said anything that either girl felt she was conscientiously called upon to repeat.

Indeed, Victor had not awoke yet sufficiently from the soft intoxication and sweet delirium of his love-dream to realize that anything practically had to be said; and Piers was very contented, too. It was delightful to have Donna again to talk to; her sympathy and companionship brought a wonderful sense of *completeness* into the vista of the future in his life;

but making a speech on the subject to her, or to any one, had not occurred to him either. Everybody was contented and happy. Hitherto there seemed nothing to say.

Lady Kellam's matrimonial lecture, however, had worried the two girls; and they were standing together in the great empty drawing-room, deep in an earnest discussion as to how Sir Robert and Lord Doringbroke might be utterly and finally extinguished, when the door opened, and the two friends entered the room.

Piers made a disconsolate face as he looked round him, and the others laughed.

Victor had been grave when he came in first; but he lit up with a glance of irrepressible fun as he watched Piers, who walked round the ball-room and examined the different arrangements with a grim air of decided dissatisfaction.

"It will be a very pretty ball," Victor said. "This room looks beautiful."

"Do *you* like a ball, Donna?" Piers asked.

"Sometimes—yes: it depends," said Donna.

"Oh, I do!" said Gaie, "when the music is good, and my partner is good, and the floor is like this one—like a bit of ice! Oh, Piers, it would do you a world of good if you were fond of dancing."

"What have they done with the piano?" said Victor, laughing.

"Look round and see," Gaie retorted.

He glanced round the room. A little orchestra had been cleverly built out over the porch and balcony; and there was the piano, hidden with festoons of flowers and evergreens, in a verdant bower, to be lit up in the evening with hanging lamps.

"How charming!" he exclaimed, with a Frenchman's love of the picturesque or festive. "What fun! May I get in?"

And as Donna nodded her permission, he stooped

under the flower-wreaths, and disappeared behind the piano, among the pink calico and green leaves.

In a moment Gaie was spinning over the smooth, glassy surface of the empty room, her two little hands clasping her tiny waist, as the strains of "An der blauen Donau" came ringing with irresistible verve and energy from the green orchestral bower.

"How splendidly he plays!" exclaimed Donna, as the beautiful floating rhythm of the Strauss swelled with the crashing vigor of a German band at Casino Tanz, and then sank softly away again into the smooth undulating cadence of the Danube river.

"A German tune, too," said Piers, to whom all music was embodied generally in the epithet, tune. "I wonder at Vic."

"It is such a sunny spirit," said Donna, "the least thing lights him up."

"Yes: he was quite melancholy as we came along. Poor old boy, it is an anxious moment for him just now, and for nearly every friend, French or German, he has in the world."

"Music has more power over him than anything: it always seems to rule his mood, or to express it."

"Yes. Ah, he is done with his waltz-playing now."

Gaie had stopped as Donna spoke, and had approached the green archway, and was leaning against the end of the grand piano that protruded towards the room. Her thoughts were answering the turn of his thoughts too, as they grew absent and sad, and as the echo of the waltz music died from beneath the touch of his fingers.

"We must not stay," he said as he played softly on. "We only came for a moment to give you the latest news."

"Where are you going now?"

"Back to the telegraph-office first; then—to a meeting," he said, taking his fingers from the piano. "There is a great gathering of all the Frenchmen resident in London, to consider the probable steps."

"And shall you speak?"

"Possibly; but no great difference or question on the subject can arise. If war is finally proclaimed, of course all capable Frenchmen will instantly—go."

Gaie said nothing: the color had quite faded from her cheek now, and she looked at him with unspeakable question in her eager eyes.

"Yes," he said, "we must all go. But I cannot quite see how it will turn out, and what will suggest itself as the best for all of us to do."

His face was very pale, too, now; and he looked up at her with a tremulous quiver on his lips and a sad wistful earnestness in his eyes.

"I do not quite see yet what will be our immediate duty: a few days will decide. How I seem to know every note of this piano!" he continued, suddenly changing his tone, and striking a chord softly again: "it speaks like no other instrument to me. I believe that to some people's ears every piano has much the same sound, good, bad, or indifferent, according to their respective value. But I very seldom get any one to agree with my feeling, that every single piano, when one knows it, has a difference in its tone just as distinct and individual as the voice of a friend. What do you think?"

"I fancy," said Gaie, "there is to me more in the touch of different players than in the piano's sound, as long as it is a tolerably good one; but that piano is always different from any other when you play it."

"I have enjoyed wonderfully playing on it, and I stick to my opinion of its individual tone. If I never saw it again," he said, taking his fingers off the notes and looking up into her face, "I should be able at any moment of my life to recall its answer as you touch each note."

"I hope you will play on it many times," said Gaie.

"*Malgré tout*," he answered, smiling a little sadly, "*qui sait? qui sait?*"

"Play something now."

"Oh, we must be off ; but stay, just this little thing. I will sing it to you. You know the air, but perhaps you never heard the words : it is Schubert's 'Abschied ;'" and he sang.

The tears were glistening on Gaie's eyelids as he finished.

"Such a sad, sad song to choose," she said, "on such a sunny day."

"It came into my head last night, and I thought then," he answered, rising, "I should like to sing it to you. I got the words two years ago from a Pole, a young fellow I knew very well ; and he had got them from the very people to whom the poet, who had written them for Schubert's music, sang them, that once and only time when the words were ever heard from him. It was in southern Poland ; the young poet was staying in their house, on his way to join the army. He sang them these words quite unexpectedly, quite suddenly, as they were separating one evening. He left them the next day ; and in two weeks afterwards he was killed. They never saw him again : that was his 'Abschied.'"

"I wish you had not sung it," she exclaimed again. "I wish you had not sung such a melancholy song."

"In a ball-room !" he said, as he bent under the flower-wreaths and came into the room. "It was too bad ; and I could not have sung them," he continued, turning to her with earnestness, "if I had not known we were to meet again in about five hours' time. We are coming in the afternoon, you know. You have given me leave to exercise my Frenchman's prerogative of bringing you some flowers ; they are coming from Paris, if Paris has time to remember my commission. I think she will ; I think they will come, and I may bring them to you myself ? Good-bye till then. Piers, I must be off : the forenoon post and the telegrams will be in by this time. We will bring you the latest news," he added, "in the afternoon."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A FAIR GOOD NIGHT, LOVE.

At five o'clock the flowers came—baskets laden with fresh beautiful bouquets for both the girls. But no Victor appeared, nor even Piers.

The midday mails had come in when they walked down to the office, and the news was decisive. There was no hope, no doubt. The call to arms was rolling with stern power through Germany, was thrilling with wild excitement every heart in France. "To arms! to arms!" "à Berlin!" "am Rhein!"

The post brought to Victor a budget of letters—one from Faustine, a torrent of excited patriotism, of revolutionary projects, and new dawning hopes; and from several of his party rhapsodical echoes of the same. And with these came another letter, curt and soldierly, from his father, telling him to join the gathering without an instant's delay; and adding that his post was ready—that already there was secured for him a commission in his own Artillery corps. The brave old Lescar wrote with all the fire of the soldier of France, full of confidence, thirsting for new military glories, and delighted at the thoughts of action and campaign.

There was much to do, much to be arranged, many people to see, much discussion and fiery oratory to be heard among the French in London during the next few hours; and it was soon decided that a special train should start at daybreak from Charing Cross for Dover, and that the company of Frenchmen hurrying to rally round the colors of their army should be thus conveyed.

It was a marked day in the history of Europe, that Fifteenth of July. Those two great nations, fevered

with the war-passion, swayed from their hearts' centre to their utmost verge ; excitement everywhere was intense.

But still Lady Kellam's ball must go on ; and she had affairs to arrange, as she hoped that night, more important to her individual interests than the coming destinies of the whole armies of Germany and France.

She received her brother-in-law's guests with a grace as composed and complacent as if there was no more important question at stake for that evening than the success of Lady Curzon Kellam's ball. She thought a good deal more of that article in the *Morning Post* of to-morrow, than of the *Times* leader on the aspect of European affairs.

The girls had seen their father for a moment, and he confirmed what, all the afternoon, had been reported on every side.

Yes, there was no doubt of it ; war was proclaimed ; Germany was arming from the Rhine to the Danube ; and France was calling her soldiers from every sunny corner of her realm.

"And Piers and Victor?" they had asked.

He did not know ; he had not seen them.

The two girls were full of anxiety ; every sympathy and sentiment of their hearts seemed touched and aroused. The coming ball in their own home seemed utterly in contradiction with their anxious thoughts and excited feelings ; but still the guests would be coming directly ; they must dress and appear.

The large rooms were quite crowded some two hours later, when Piers and Victor at last arrived. They were both grave and silent as they reached the house ; and although Victor's eyes sparkled with something of a Frenchman's eagerness and enthusiasm, his cheek was deadly pale.

He ran up the stairs, scarce waiting for Piers's slower movements ; he reached the crowded doorway, and scanned the glittering mass of dancers with a rapid, searching glance. He scarcely seemed to see

them ; and of Lady Kellam, waiting at the door for his formal salutation, he was utterly unconscious.

He was full, evidently, in his quick impulsive way, of just one idea ; and the ball-room and its crowd of dancers, Lady Kellam and her frown of dissatisfaction, made no impression on his mind. There was enough of troubled, excited, and contending feeling struggling in his eager heart at that moment to make him forget everything in existence save the immediate future and the destiny it contained.

The room was very full of dancers, but he soon distinguished the face he sought. Gaie was just opposite to him. People were waltzing at that moment, and he had to pause until the dance was concluded before he could cross the room ; then he threaded his way. He went straight towards her, and in utter disregard of Lord Dorringbroke, who was bending over her and whispering softly his small remarks, Victor looked into Gaie's face with an expression she answered instantly, by the quiver of her lips and the tears that rushed into her eyes.

"Will you come?" he said. "I want to tell you." And she rose and took his arm.

Lord Dorringbroke had indeed looked indignant, but Gaie had quite forgotten him.

Victor led her through the crowd, out at the drawing-room door, past Lady Kellam with silent audacity, and out on to the landing, which was still as crowded as the room.

They paused, and he looked down at her for a moment, and then half mechanically they both slowly descended the stairs. But still there were crowds everywhere. The supper had just begun in the dining-room ; the library was full of ladies, cloaking and being uncloaked. Gaie's hand trembled on Victor's arm as he looked round distractedly.

"Where shall we go?" he said at last in despair, *but in perfect simplicity, as if his wish to appropriate*

and to talk to her at that moment was quite a natural thing. It seemed so to both of them, at all events.

"Here," she said at length ; and she drew him aside towards a door, which she pushed open and shut behind them, as they entered the room. It was her father's study, and sacred against all invasions of tea and ices, or even ladies' cloaks. His writing-table stood in the centre, his huge book-cases with marble busts on their summits lined the walls, and a bow-window opening on to a row of steps that led into the garden filled up one whole side. There was no light in the room ; but the blinds had not been pulled down, and there streamed through the window the beautiful radiance of a midsummer full moon, and the large garden and sombre room were illumined by its soft silvery light.

They walked close to the window, and Victor leaned on it ; and for a moment they looked in silence into each other's faces.

"Good-bye, Gaie," Victor said at last. "It is very hard to say it."

She caught his hand.

"Victor, Victor, I cannot."

"You have heard it all," he went on ; "I must go. The call has come, Gaie ; look, here is my father's letter. It is all arranged ; but I could not go,—I cannot leave you without saying—without telling you how difficult it is."

"Victor, Victor !"

"Let me tell you, darling," he continued. "I may call you so ; I may say to-night, 'Gaie, my own, my love,'—I may tell you how it is for me. I never thought I could live to answer with one sigh of reluctance the call of the army of France. But it is so,—I scarcely know *how* to leave you."

Her face had sunk into her hands, and she stood before him with her head bent, the moonlight falling on its golden shades. She could not answer him.

"And yet, Gaie, my queen, I must go ; just as life

has become sweet and precious and dear to me, I must go. It is hard—it is hard, and yet every sentiment within me, worthy of a man or a soldier, says go. Gaie, you would not have me stay, darling,—even that we might be happy together, just you and I.”

“No, no, Victor, I know ; I know you must go,” she murmured.

“Thank you,” he said, with a tight heaving of his chest. “Say it again, Gaie ; strengthen me,—send me, drive me from you. Oh, look up, look up ; speak to me again ; give me courage to leave you.”

And he drew her hands gently from her face and held them in his own, as she struggled with her tears and raised her eyes to him. She shook her head.

“You do not want courage, Victor,” she said.

“Not to fight for France, not to die—no, no ; but to leave you. I love you—I love you. I never loved any one until I knew you. I was always, always looking for my Queen ; and, Gaie, the moment I saw you, I knew I had found her.”

“We have been so happy, Victor,” she said ; “so happy, so very happy.”

“It has been too much heaven for me to last, darling. I should soon have forgotten everything—patriotism, the Universal, and everything else. All these long sweet weeks, Gaie, I have only seemed to want just you, and now—I must leave you.”

“Victor, I am so glad it has all been. I am so glad we had so many times, such nice times, dear—the evenings when we played ; and, Victor, more than all, the day we went to the picture.”

“We shall never forget anything, shall we, darling—never, never, whatever may happen in the time to come ?”

“Victor, Victor, *can* people forget ?”

“Some do, but I do not think you could, and I do *not* think you will be afraid of me.”

“Not of your forgetting ; but, oh, Victor, what

may come!" and she shivered from head to foot, and her cheek paled again. "War——"

"And war means battle and bloodshed, and perhaps—death."

"Victor, Victor, I cannot bear it!"

"Dearest, it may not be so; but if it is—then, Gaie, we will think of the picture. Then you will come; you will remember, I know. I shall feel your face bending over me, if ever I am wounded or going to die. And when victories come, and I have perhaps medals and trophies of our glories to show you, I will bring them all to you to lay at your feet, my Queen."

"Victor, Victor, it is too terrible."

"Think of it in that light. It will be a glorious war, and we Frenchmen have more to do than many know of against those stern German ranks; but there is no fear, Gaie, we will bring you back our laurels, and you will not scorn a knight from the victorious armies of France."

"Victor, oh, I wish it need not be!"

"It must, it must," he answered. "It has been threatening many a day, and it has come to-night. Ah, Gaie, I have so little time; we are going to-night, and there is still so much to be done; but I felt I must come to you. It would not have been enough to write and tell you how I love you; I felt I must come and get the answer, dearest, from your own lips and from your own blue eyes before I went away,—the answer I want, that will go with me as my hope, and my strength, and my inspiration, wherever I may be led. You love me, Gaie?"

"Victor, I have been so happy since that day at the picture, when I thought first you did care for me, as I could not help caring for you. It seems so wonderful—such a little while; but it made me so happy."

"My darling!" he bent and drew her close to him.

"I could not help it, Victor; and now, oh, it is so hard—so hard. Why must it be? Oh! the cruel

war; just as we realized what it is to be together, and what it would be always forever—for all our lives.”

“Courage, my darling; nay, do not weep for me. I shall be sorry you ever had to know me, if I have only brought you pain; and I cannot be sorry, I cannot; for it is so much to me. The memory of your face—your love, my angel of the ‘*Janua Vitæ*.’ I may have the thought of you now always, always with me wherever I go. You will wait for me, and love me, Gaie——?”

“Victor, Victor, you know I will.”

“My own one, I must go, Gaie. I must see your father; I must tell him, in a few words, what I have said to you. I hope he will not think it very wrong, darling; but I could not go—I could not, without telling you, how—I leave you *all* my love.”

He wound his arm round her once more, and held her close to him for one little moment, and kissed the tears away, and murmured his broken words of comfort and courage; and they stood together, in the quiet moonlight, in the silent anguish of mingled and struggling feeling, thrilled with intense joy at the full assurance of each other’s love, and pierced with the bitter pain of the parting that must, must be.

“Gaie,” he murmured once again, “I must go: it is late. Farewell, farewell! Can you not give me something—some little thing you have worn?—something to look at, and to touch to my lips, when I think, all alone, by the camp fire, in the long nights, of you? Give me something. Look, darling, take this from me,” he added, drawing a small ring from his finger and slipping it on hers. “It was my mother’s: keep it for me till we meet again.”

“I will always wear it, Victor. Stay; what can I give to you? What have I down here? Ah, yes; how curious!” and she drew back from him a little, and put up her hands to unclasp the gold chain by which a closed locket hung round her neck. Will you have this? Look; would you like it? It is not mine;

it is Donna's. I told her to-night, while we were dressing, I had put it on by mistake. But I can give her another. Look ; is it not curious I should have it here ?”

She touched a spring, and the locket sprang open, and revealed an exquisite tinted miniature of herself. Victor exclaimed with delight,—

“ May I have it ? Oh, Gaie, I am so glad ! Thank you, thank you. I shall have you really with me now.”

She slid out the chain that had hung in double rows round her neck, and stood up as he bent towards her, and flung it over his head.

“ There !” she said, laughing through her tears, “ I give myself quite—quite—to you.”

“ God help me, Gaie ; it is terrible to leave you. God give me courage ; my darling—my darling, good-bye, good-bye.”

He held her close to him for one minute ; his heart seemed breaking with its tumult of love and despair. But—he must go.

Another moment, and they stood again in the crowd on the staircase. Gaie, utterly forgetful of every other guest of the evening, had drawn her hand from his arm, and fled upstairs to her room ; and Victor, pale and agitated, searched among the dancers and the supper-party for Piers and Sir John.

Meantime, Piers had had nearly as much on his mind for this evening as Victor. He, too, was going abroad. His friend, beloved and well tried through many a changeful year, was going away from him, and going into scenes of trouble and danger.

Victor was to join the rank and file of the gathering army ; and, without hesitation, Piers determined to accompany him, at least to Paris—as much farther as he could. He, too, was going ; he, too, had his farewell to say.

But Piers never could go direct to his point, as Victor did. Promptitude was the salient element of

one character, hesitation and diffidence, of the other. So, when Victor entered the crowded ball-room, made his way direct to Gaie, and appropriated her unhesitatingly, and led her from the room, Piers had stood still, leaning in the doorway, watching first Victor and Gaie as they passed close to him, and when they were gone, watching with grave consideration several other groups on different sides.

He stood a long time as they danced round him ; and thus he had the benefit of several bits of conversation not intended for his ears.

He had shaken hands with Lady Kellam, and she had glanced uneasily round as she saw him enter ; and her expression brightened into complacency as he paused near her, and stood by the door. Satisfactory so far, she thought ; for Sir Robert Carre was left in undisturbed possession of Donna on the other side.

"How pretty the two Miss Graemes look to-night," said a voice suddenly, quite close to Piers, who, glancing round, perceived that a couple of dancers had paused by his side.

"They do," was the answer. "Where is the little one?"

"Oh, she has just left the room with that young Lescar. What a handsome fellow he is!"

"Yes ; a Frenchman, is he not?"

"I believe so ; half English, though. He is off to-night, Sir John tells me, to join the army of Lorraine."

"Is he ? Like a Frenchman, dancing to the last."

"Ah, exactly. There is young Dorringbroke. Is the little Miss Graeme going to marry him?"

"So says everybody."

"And everybody generally knows."

"No doubt about the other one, at all events," continued the first speaker, nodding towards the other side of the room. Piers turned his tall figure half round, and looked down on the couple. They did not

know him by sight, as it happened, so in happy unconsciousness they went on.

"Never expected to see Carre so completely taken," said the gentleman. "He is regularly done; and I do not wonder either. She is an awfully nice girl."

"Then it is settled?"

"I believe so; looks like it, does it not? But we are losing all this music. Shall we dance again?" And they waltzed away.

Piers stood alone again, his eyes resting dreamily upon nothing, his thoughts suddenly arrested in their complacent tranquility by a quick, angry recognition of something in somebody or in himself.

How he hated that Sir Robert Carre, he thought; and, oddly enough, he had never known he hated him until now. How could he ever have been civil to him?—"conceited, got-up old fool!" Donna like him? Donna going to marry him? Impossible!

And yet, there, as he stood silent and hesitating in the archway, Sir Robert, at that very moment, was rising to give Donna his arm, and was leading her towards the head of the staircase by the other door. Piers was indignant indeed.

Well, he thought, if she would go, if she wished to go, if she walked out of the room, and never once looked towards him, or came to speak to him, at her own ball, among all this strange crowd, why should he care?

He could not know that Donna, at that moment, was going slowly downstairs, very wistful and sad at heart because he had stood there so silent, and had never come up to speak to her.

But he felt aggrieved and angry, though why, or at what (unless it was Sir Robert Carre), he would have found it difficult to say; but he stood still, pulling his moustache, and conducting himself in that peculiar manner too common to him in scenes of this kind, when no one came to rouse him up—conduct

that some people imputed to an interesting shyness, and others to insufferable airs ; and all the time he was feeling very miserable. "He was going away," he thought, "and Donna did not care. Long ago surely it was different ; when he went and came, she used to care." And then the memories of those old "long ago" days came pleasantly to him. Her friendship had been so sweet, her companionship so sympathetic, so helpful in every way ; and now he seemed to realize she had become more to him than she had ever been before, and he wished to tell her so ; he wished to say good-bye, he thought, and to say it somehow differently from all former farewells—to say, he did not know what ; but he wanted Donna, he hated Sir Robert, and he felt bitter and aggrieved.

Victor did not return, nor did Gaie, for a long time ; but Donna came again, she moved about the rooms, but still she seemed to keep away from him. She spoke to her guests, she passed from one group to another, she did her honors, and all the time Sir Robert never seemed to leave her side. And people danced, and went and came, and descended to supper and returned again, and sat on the staircase, and panted on the landings, and waltzed and quadrilled, and waltzed again.

Sir John talked here and there to the different chaperones, in his grave way ; and all the talk, as he took them to supper and brought them back again, was about the war—always the war : people could speak that night of nothing but the terrible aspect of France and Germany, and of that woful war.

At length a hand touched Piers on the shoulder. He turned suddenly : Victor stood by his side, pale with agitation, with quivering lips and glistening eyes.

"Old fellow," he said, "I must be going, and, for one moment, I must catch Sir John. You are coming, are you not, Piers—you are coming with me?"

"Yes, yes, Vic. Where have you been? Where is Gaie? What is the matter?"

"Never mind. I will tell you everything presently. She has gone upstairs; she will not come in again. I must just speak to Miss Graeme one word of good-bye, Piers, and then I must see Sir John. Will you wait for me downstairs, old friend? We must not lose one moment."

"Yes, yes, I will be ready. Stay, I will see Donna, I will tell her. Where is she? She has left the room again;" and he looked with gloomy irritation around.

"She went out by that door," said Victor, "an instant ago, with Sir Robert Carre. Yes; tell her I shall not have time to explain more than to Sir John. Gaie will tell her everything, of course."

"All right," Piers answered; "I will be ready for you. I will go and find Donna at once."

"In ten minutes I will be in the hall with you," said Victor; and he crossed the room to Sir John.

Piers had wasted all his time: he, too, now, if he had anything to say, had not a moment to lose. He ran down stairs towards the dining-room. Many guests were leaving; the rooms were much emptier now. Donna stood near the table; and close by her, speaking in low, earnest tones, was Sir Robert Carre.

Piers was sufficiently intent on his object now, at all events; he went up to them unhesitatingly, breaking in upon Sir Robert's conversation.

"Donna!" She turned instantly at his first word; Sir Robert stood back.

"Will you——?" said Piers, hesitating again. "I want to say a word to you—of good-bye, Donna. I am going with Victor to-night; and——"

She turned to him as he spoke, and put her hand within his arm. She thought he wished her to move away with him, but he stood still. Sir Robert looked annoyed at the interruption, but shrugging his shoulders with a polite sarcastic little speech, in which he described himself very truthfully as being *de trop*, he bowed and walked away.

Donna looked curiously up into Piers's face. She

did not quite understand what he wanted—what was his mood. She realized the announcement that he was going away, and that did not surprise her; but Piers's aspect did. He was flushed evidently with unwonted excitement, and his face was clouded with strong feeling.

The few guests that remained were dancing upstairs again now. When Sir Robert left them, they had the supper-room to themselves.

"You are going, Piers!"

"Yes. Victor has been called to join the army, and I cannot let him go alone. I *must* see what becomes of him; I must accompany him as far as I can. And before I go, oh, Donna," he said, changing his tone suddenly to an accent of angry and passionate expostulation, "you are *not* going to marry Sir Robert Carre!"

"I, Piers?" Her eyes softened with a half-amused, half-happy light in them, as they rested upon his troubled face.

"Because, Donna," he had caught her hand in his, "I am going away, and—*you know*. Donna, all these years, ever since we were boy and girl together, you must know—what I feel for you, and I could not stand it now, Donna—I could not."

"What *you* feel for *me*, Piers?" she whispered softly.

"Yes, you *must* know I could not bear it now, if you married any other fellow. I could not do without you, Donna. I should never go right; I should never come to any good. All my hope lately has been in having you. And now, if, while I am away with Victor, you marry Sir Robert Carre!" He stopped in his outburst of protest and agitation.

"Piers, Piers!" said Donna, holding his hand tight as she looked up at him, and her voice rang with its echo of irrepressible tenderness, "do you *really* think *that* in all my life long I have ever cared for any one *but—you*?"

"I am so glad," he said gravely ; and then he looked down into her clear eyes for a moment with an expression of intense relief and self consolation in his.

"I am so happy," she whispered, "so—so happy, Piers."

"And so am I ; but I must go away," he continued a little disconsolately. "I must go, must I not, Donna, with Victor ?"

"Yes, yes ; dear, brave Victor ! Where is he, Piers ? Where is Gaie ? Oh ! how terrible it all is. Why, why will people allow wars to be ?—oh, Piers !"

"Yes, it is terrible !" he said ; but he spoke in a dreamy tone, and he put up his hand and pushed his hair back from his forehead while the bright satisfied look still shone from his eyes ; and "Donna," he went on, "I am *so* happy. It seem horribly selfish to say so, because of Victor, and because I know what it must be for *him*. But I cannot help it. Donna, I am very happy ; and Victor—ah, here he is ; and we *must* go. But—I will write to you, Donna ; and it is all right between us now, is it not ? I am so glad ; and *you* will write to me."

They had not time for more. There was Victor, and behind him Sir John, with a softened concerned expression on his face. One silent clasp of the hand between Victor and Donna, a few more eager words from Piers, Sir John's fervent blessing and warm farewell for both of them, and they were gone.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

EACH TO HIS POST.

LADY KELLAM's indignation, when all this was revealed to her, may be imagined, but not described—the vain remonstrances that she heaped upon Sir John,

the fumes of fury in which she indulged during a prolonged interview in his study, and the frame of mind in which she finally repaired upstairs, wept over her nieces, sighed over them, and felt unspeakably irritated and provoked as she met the glow of quiet intense happiness that spoke in both faces, struggling like a gleam of sunshine through the tears that lingered from the partings of the night before. Piers and Victor were gone, indeed; but they had left a memory very sweet and precious behind.

Still the girls had had rather a sad day. There was a violent reaction, as evening came on, from the intense excitement of the ball, the explanations, and the partings; and, by five o'clock, Gaie was sitting by Donna's low chair, leaning her head against her sister, and dropping many a silent tear, as the realization began to come fully to her of the possibly terrible future that lay before her, and before him who loved her, and whom she so dearly loved.

Piers would be back, safe and happy, before long; but Victor—ah! what might the next few weeks portend of weal or woe for him!

They were feeling a little sad and lonely, for their father was out; and when Lady Kellam had left them, the two young hearts seemed too full to speak, even to each other. They sat there, Donna's fingers twining themselves slowly in Gaie's bright hair, the fire dancing upon both of them, and the tea-table forgotten by their side. And they had been silent for some time, when the bell rang suddenly, footsteps were heard upon the stairs, their door was thrown open, and the servant announced "Madame Prioleau."

Both the girls rose instantly; she came forward with a hand to each; but it was to Gaie she turned first, with a quivering tenderness in her face, as she put her arms round the girl and drew her close to her, and smoothed softly her wavy hair.

"Dear, dear child!"

"You know?" Gaie whispered.

"Yes ; he came to me for one instant last thing, on their way ; and he was so bright, so hopeful, so happy, and he sent you back his love."

"Dear Victor !" Donna said ; for Gaie only dropped her head on to Madame Prioleau's shoulder for a moment, and could say nothing.

"It was splendid to see him, bright, brave young soldier. I must take him the latest message from you."

"Take him !" exclaimed Gaie, raising her head to look into Madame Prioleau's earnest face.

"Yes, I am going ; I have had my call. They have a place for me ready. I must go and take it at once. I only came to you for a few minutes. I am off to-night."

"You, Madame Prioleau ? Oh, dear !" sighed Donna.

"You !" exclaimed Gaie, brightening up suddenly "Oh, how glorious ! How I wish I were you ! Oh ! if we could only go, Donna. Why cannot we ? Why cannot we go ?"

"Our father, Gaie," whispered Donna.

"Yes, yes, I know ; but Donna, Madame Prioleau, fancy staying here in the midst of this idleness and sunshine and frivolity, while you are going—while every one is going. Oh, it is terrible !"

"We need not go out any more now, dearest ; no one will wish it—no one will make us," said Donna.

"No ; but even if we do not, to stay here doing nothing—nothing—nothing—while you are having such a great, grand work to do, and serving really in the Cause—oh, Madame Prioleau !"

"*They also serve, who only stand and wait,*" murmured Madame Prioleau, as she bent with a soft caressing gesture over Gaie's head. She was silent a few moments ; then she looked up, and went on brightly again in earnest tones to both the girls. "Fear not, my children ; love work—look for work ; you will find it, or it will find you. Wait now, Gaie—wait and write to him, and hope, and trust, and pray."

"Yes," sighed the girl impatiently, "ju man's part always—the most terrible, the cult, the worst to do—nothing but stay and

Madame Prioleau gathered her into her arms. "Patience, my child," she murmured, "courage—fear not; all will be well. The future—I feel sure it will be a bright one, much it is clouded now; trust it, my child, forward, and above all—look up. And do not leave you," she continued, turning to give a kiss to Donna with a brightened smile. "I am Piers, too," she said. "I am so glad you seemed so happy; and you—I need not say the sweetness of a first ideal! Dear young man, I am so glad; and now good-bye. Think of me, I will never forget our happy talks; and you may meet again some day—who knows? I will think of you often, and with keen interest in your life. You have a glorious future, I do believe in you. That is a noble nature—dark only by the very shadow of its own depth. With your constant sunshine it will light up into clearness and brilliancy, and shed light for others upon many a way. Keep up your courage, my children. Good-bye to you both."

A few more words of murmured farewell—lingering embrace for each of them, and the two girls were solitary and disconsolate; Madame Prioleau too was gone.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

OLD AUBER.

It is over.

From the Rhine to the Loire, from the Alps to the Seine, France is crimson with her children.

The terrible months are over : the Emperor is in exile; the armies of Prussia cover the fair fields of Lorraine. The vineyards are wasted ; the harvest is trodden under foot; the peasant homes are desolate; the smokes of a hundred villages rise sadly to heaven.

War has done its work.

Paris is humbled to the very dust. She veils her countenance, and the conqueror treads her streets. It is a terrible day for her—the darkest her bright, thoughtless, passionate existence has ever known.

As the troops of the Crown Prince were filing into the Champs Elysées, as the dull thunder of the artillery growl was silenced and passing slowly away into the distant echoes of the past, as that afternoon closing proudly for Germany, the warfare of their Rhine faded into night, in the midst of that strange stillness which succeeded, with a curious stunning effect, the ceaseless roar of artillery, in a small house remote from the scene of the Prussian triumph, beneath a roof blackened and torn by a Mont Valérien shell, in a little gilded chamber, an old man lay dying.

The sun was struggling through the closed lattice, and fell in thin single golden rays across his bed : it touched the grey locks that curled on his forehead : it answered, as with a strange glow of heavenly light, the smile of peace and satisfaction that lingered on the pale lips. It will not be expelled, that ray of sunshine; it breaks in to meet the sweet radiance of the pure spirit that is passing from earth's darkness to the morning-break of everlasting day.

Auber Dax's eyes turn towards the sun-ray, and he greets it as it touches his worn cheek with a smile sweet and radiant as its own.

The little chamber is almost empty, save for the bed on which Dax is lying; the chair, the table, every article of movable furniture, has been consumed in the smouldering stove through that weary winter, in the dire struggle against the chill enemy that with the winter came.

At his side, hanging over him, with the dark light of her eyes gleaming with unwonted softness, her black lashes wet with glistening tears, stood Faustine, changed terribly by these months of suffering, paled by the gaunt hunger of many a day. She was changed in attire also; she wore the short blue frock, the dark jerkin, the red sash and rifle-belt that had been carried, during the past few weeks, by such of the women of Paris as joined their friends, brothers, and husbands in the toil of her defence,—the women who took turns as sentinels, and carried the gun through midnight watches, while their worn-out compatriots fell for an hour on the roadside and slept: the women who, during that first siege, won the applause and honor—we wish the second siege had left them.

She hung over Père Dax in silence, or whispered broken answers to his murmured words. Her eyes rested sadly upon his face, and were only raised from time to time to fix themselves upon another,—the pale, worn countenance of Victor Lescar, who leaned upon the bar at the foot of the little bed, and gazed with dry, pained eyes upon the old man.

The sun sank away; the light grew dim in the fading eyes; the thin, worn cheek became pale with the grey twilight shade of evening as it filled the room.

"It is nearly over," sighed Faustine, a struggling, passionate throb of feeling in her voice.

"Nearly over?" the old man murmured,—his ear had caught her words,—"*over*; the night is past; the dawn will come. Peace, peace—"

"Peace!" exclaimed Faustine; "only for such as he is—only where he is going. Oh, where, where?" she uttered passionately; "*mon père! mon père!* where does he see his peace? Where does he catch that light, that sweetness, Victor, that smile? And here—ah! he leaves us; and for us all is blackness, shame, and despair!"

"Hush!" Victor murmured low. "Hush! do not disturb him."

The pallor and repose of death were creeping over the old man's brow. Faustine sank on her knees, her face hidden by her quivering hands, her strong young frame shaken by sobs, agonized and passionate. Victor laid his hand softly on her shoulder, and bent over her prostrate head and over the old dying man. The feeble hand was outstretched now; the eyes were growing dim; the sweet smile was settling into a fixed expression of repose upon the thin lips. The hand moved feebly, and felt for something, with eagerness. Victor took it into his, and guided it to the resting-place it sought. He laid it on Faustine's head—that dark, proud head, bent in prostration of sorrow now.

The old man's eyes sought Victor, and his lips moved.

"Peace to come," he whispered again; "the Prince will come—love—brotherhood—France!"

Victor answered the quivering smile. He bent and touched the pale brow with his lips, and then he watched silently.

It was but a few moments now. The sun faded quietly away. Faustine knelt still, sorrowful, speechless. Twilight filled the room with its grey, dreamy shades; and—as a weary child, when the night drops her curtain, sinks into soft repose—so Father Dax passed, from his restless children, away beyond the tumult and rebellion, the tears and the troubles of his passionate nation—away to the land of his dream, to the source of his tranquil vision—away to the realization of which he had seen the dim shadows here—away—

"To where, beyond these voices there is—peace."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IN THE MIDST OF THE FIRES.

IN the midst of the gloomy excitement that for the next two days filled Paris, there were friends found, and time found to accompany the old father of the "Universal" to an honored tomb. Along the silent, shadowed streets, while the Prussians lay encamped in the Champs Elysées, while the growl echoed from corner to corner of Paris, of that storm that was yet still to come, the procession moved from the Place St. Etienne, bearing Auber Dax from his charred and ruined home.

In the evening it was over, and soon forgotten. Men, and especially such men as had formed the circle of Auber's friends, had their minds full of many other things.

And even the hearts of these two, to whom he was dearest and most near, throbbed with the fevered fire of new ominous excitement, as they returned side by side to the Place St. Etienne again.

The little gilded room, where Faustine had once held her soirées, where men had brought her those fragrant trophies of their devotion, wreaths of sweet-scented flowers, was, like every room of Paris at that hour, desolate and comfortless, when the two returned to it this March afternoon. Faustine, with eyes dull and weary from sorrow and watching, had passed through the little sitting-room, and had gone upstairs, leaving Victor to wait for her below.

"I will come back soon," she had said as she left him. "I must see you, and talk to you, Victor. I have much to say. But wait—let me have a few moments : I would be alone." And so she had left him.

And Victor entered the little room, and glanced

round at its changed and barren aspect—at the dim and dusty ornaments of the walls, at the windows, where no flowers scented the spring air, at the fireplace, empty of the crackling wood log, at the ruin and devastation that he knew marked, as it marked this one, every Parisian home; and a great sigh escaped him, and he tossed aside his cap, and pushed back the hair that grew long and untended over his pale forehead.

He was terribly changed. Years, instead of months, might have rolled over his head since he parted with Gaie on that July night of last summer. Years of age, and anxiety, and bitterness had settled in deep lines upon his brow; and his fair delicate features were worn and pallid, as with suffering of heart and spirit, as well as of bodily frame. He had no scar of sword or shot upon him, however, though he had passed through many a battle for France.

To trace his steps for the last eight months would be to follow the fortunes of the French army from the loss of Sedan to this moment in Paris—a history too familiar to require one descriptive word.

He lived; no German bullet had touched him; death refused to spare him the humiliation and the bitterness of disgrace. He lived; and his arm was still strong, his blood was still young and fiery, his heart vigorous and proud; and he must live, the son of defeat, the soldier of a conquered army, a child of France a partaker of her shame; and it seemed impossible!

Live at ease, while she lay prostrate?—live in peace, while she bent in chains? Impossible!

It was a terrible fever, that in that dark hour of the conqueror in Paris, fired the young brains of France.

There still grew in Victor's brain that fever of patriotism, that agony of national pride, that wild delirious hope that redemption and salvation for their beloved country still lay for France in the power of her sons. He would not resign the hope; he would *not resign it and live.*

He was very weary. He had arrived the night before, after hasty travelling, from the camp at Nevers. He had come instantly on the news of the Capitulation; he had cast aside his uniform then, and sent in his resignation to the head-quarters of the army.

And Victor left the camp at Nevers, threw up his commission, and is in fated Paris now. He is very weary with travel and excitement; his courage for the moment seems gone. He sank back on the sofa; his head fell again upon his arm. The grave, concentrated expression of pain and eagerness left his delicate face; it became gradually calm, sweet and childlike, and in his weariness—he fell asleep.

He slept on as the sun sank; he was quite worn out, and he did not move even when a hand touched the door, when it opened, and Faustine entered the room.

She came over to him; she thought he was leaning there weary; she paused as she saw he was asleep.

Her dark handsome face softened and quivered and melted,—and he still lay unconscious there, and slept softly, while she stood by him and watched.

They were all alone in that great desolation—all alone of all the old friends of St. Marteau and the Rue St. Clive; all alone,—just these two.

He did not move as she knelt down and looked close into his face; she sighed as she scanned it. She had not seen him since that march from Paris, in the glorious days of last July. She had not seen him during all these months of war, during all these gaunt days when she and the *petit père* had been here in Paris, suffering famine and siege. And his face was altered,—pale as hers was pale, worn as hers was worn. The stamp was set deep upon the cheek of both—the stamp of national suffering, of a people's agony and woe.

The face looked very delicate; her eyes softened to tenderness as they rested on its quiet sweetness now.

"How he sleeps!" she murmured. "Poor boy,—like a weary child."

She rose and shut the window ; she took up a light shawl, and threw it over him. She bent again, and knelt gazing by his side.

"Victor, Victor!" the words broke from her ; and the strong, passionate love of her life for him swept in a cloud of feeling over her dark face.

How she had loved ! This strange girl,—how through years of her turbulent, feverish life he had been the softness of her womanhood, the idol of her devotion hidden within her strong heart.

She bent low, for her heart was full and overpowered her. There was the emotion of their meeting ; there was the agony of apprehension that the future might bring a quick farewell. She bent over him ; she put her hand up and pushed the fair curls back from his pale temples, as she drew the shawl close to his shoulder ; for the darkening evening grew chill.

"*Mon bien aimé!*" she whispered, "how I have loved you ; how long, how truly, how well ! and—you *never* knew it ! You think me great as you are—as single in my patriotism, as undivided in my love of France. *Mon bien aimé!* and you are my France, you my glory, you the secret of my patriotic love ; and—you *never* knew it !"

The words were half thought, half murmured, as she stayed there, and the twilight fell over them and the time went on.

"You were too great always—always," she continued, "for idle love. You were ever patriot, single and undivided, in your patriotic devotion. Ah ! and I—the strongest among all of them, as men used to say—I have been weak, so weak, through all these years. God knows how weak, how suffering ; for I have loved as women love, Victor—I have loved you."

She put her hand softly on his shoulder.

"Am I to blame?" she murmured. "Could I have

known you—and *not* loved you, Victor—you, greatest, noblest, best? But I do not repine that you never loved *me*—for I am but a weak, weak woman, and I loved you truly, Victor: but—*your* love was—France!”

She paused in her thought, in her murmured words; she looked at him, her hand still lying on his shoulder.

He moved slightly; his shoulder was drawn back; and as he turned her hand touched something—something that, in his sleep and in his restless movement, fell from its hiding-place around his neck. It was cold, hard, glittering; her fingers clutched it. It was a woman's delicate, fragile chain. She drew it forth—and a pallor, deadlier than when the Prussian cannon had roared round her, overspread her face.

A fierce tremor shook her kneeling frame; she set her teeth in her quivering lip, and her eyes gleamed with the fury of a tigress, as she drew forth slowly the fragile glittering thing.

It was a long chain of daintily twisted cable. She drew it through her fingers, and in one instant the locket with its monogram lay in her hand. She knew the secret of a woman's jewellery, and instantly she detected the tiny spring; she touched it, the lid sprang open, and her eyes rested on the fair young face within.

She looked but one second; then she sprang to her feet, mad with her agony of awakened jealousy, furious at the discovery, so unexpected, so unforeseen. Her blood had been fevered by many a fearful excitement through these months gone by: it seemed fired with a terrible delirium now; she became unconscious of what she said or did; she lost all self-control.

She stood up, she ~~started~~ ^{darted} back from him, and with an angry wrench, and with the strength that her passion gave her, she tore the delicate chain from his ^{neck}.

He awoke instantly. He started, and looked for one moment astonished from side to side. Then he put up his hand eagerly ; he felt for his treasure—it was gone. Then his glance turned upon Faustine.

She stood there some paces from him, her eyes glaring on him full of fury, her cheek crimson with excitement, the fragments of his broken chain in her outstretched hand.

He did not understand—not even *then*. But he saw that she was angry ; and the thought that came first was, that *he* had dropped, and *she* had found his chain.

He rose and came towards her, and she started still farther back.

“Give me that, Faustine,” he said in a soft tone.

“Give it to you !” she exclaimed. “After all, then, you, you, you, Victor—are just like all the rest !”

“What do you mean ?” he answered. “Give me the locket, Faustine. It is the most precious thing I have on earth. Take care, do not injure it !” he exclaimed, for she made as if she would have dashed it on the ground. “Faustine, what do you mean ? Where did you find it ?”

“You have deceived me !” she continued. “You concealed this, and you pretended—and I thought—you——”

“What are you saying ? I concealed nothing. Whom have I deceived ? I would have told you—I meant to tell you ; but since you and I have met again, alas ! there has been enough around us to forbid all mention of our private interests or concerns. Give it to me, Faustine.”

She dashed the fragile locket from her ; she turned, and sank on a seat by the little table, her face buried in her hands. She was weeping bitterly now : she was not patriot at this moment ; only a woman—loving and heartbroken, her pride quite overwhelmed by the anguish of disappointed love.

Victor picked up his locket, and hid it carefully

away. Then he came over to her ; he put his hand upon her shoulder, and bent over her in the gentle brotherly way he always had with her.

"Faustine," he said, "what is it ? You are broken down with fatigue; you are worn out. What is it?—tell me."

"I cannot, Victor, I cannot !" she broke out again; and she covered her face to weep bitter tears.

"You are worn out : what is it ? Tell me. Look up at me, my sister."

"Go, Victor !" she exclaimed again. "Go, go !—will you not leave me ?"

"I cannot," he said.

Then—suddenly she looked up at him. He was standing there still by her, silent, sorrowful, patient. He did not speak after his last words, until at length—she looked up.

Through the burning tears, her eyes met his, and—she could not suppress it—it broke out in her gaze at last, that light of infinite, eager tenderness, of jealous, passionate love ; it met his eyes at last.

It flashed with a new light upon his heart ; it spoke in that silent moment the bitter secret of her feverish heart and soul.

He looked down on her, he drew his hand from her shoulder ; his lips quivered strangely, and his eyes softened as he met that sweet wild light in hers.

"Victor, Victor !" she said softly, a full confession in the whispered words—confession as unreserved as if death stood really between them, and this parting was to be their last.

And a low exclamation broke from his lips.

"Faustine," he said in tones full of earnest tenderness, and of eager compassionate brother's love—"Faustine—that I had guessed this—years and years ago !"

He stood silent then, and immovable for a moment, *looking at her with a gaze full of earnest sorrowful affection and of tender pity. His heart was breaking*

with compassion for her, and he felt stunned for a moment with the mingled astonishment and regret at the revelation that had broken upon him with such sudden force. He looked at her as she wept on in bitterness. It seemed terrible—in the midst of this great desolation they were so utterly alone. She was so bereft and friendless; and he had mistaken her so fatally through all these years, that in her sorrow and bereavement he could be of little comfort now.

Then he drew near her, and, standing close by her side, took one hand that had fallen listless, while the other was clasped over her eyes. He took it into his, and raised it with gentle reverence to his lips.

“Faustine——”

She could not answer him; she shuddered again violently as he spoke; she turned her face farther away, and she drew her hand from his clasp.

He stood still by her, silent again, an expression of intense pain coming over his face. It lingered there for a moment; he looked perplexed and wearied out with emotion and pain. Then he brightened, a sad, softened look gleaming in his eyes. He touched her hand once more, and this time she was quieter, and let it lie unresistingly in his.

“Faustine,” he said again, “does it much matter—as we stand now—as all these bright, sweet things of our life seem fading into a shadowy past—as we plunge into our destiny, fixed and inevitable? Weep for *her*: you and I are still united—sister and brother—in the same cause together. Together we have lived, Faustine; together—we shall die.”

She looked up, and caught his hand for a moment, in proud exultation, and dashed her burning tears away.

“Yes,” she exclaimed; “*she* cannot have you? You belong to France.”

“I do,” he said gravely; “and none know it better than she.”

“*She!* pale-faced Englishwoman, what does she

know of us? You are ours, Victor; you are a sworn, devoted son of the people, soldier of the Republic, child of France; you are ours!"

"I know it," he said, bending his head again. "Faustine, you are weary and excited; my sister, rest. To-morrow, we have still work to do."

"We have!" she cried. "Paris shall be free yet. The cursed enemy shall be driven from her gates. Ah! Victor, I am no woman such as you love, am I? I am no sweet-eyed gentle daughter of a tranquil race. Ah! but you are mine—mine and the Republic's. Yes; we will fight together, as you say. Away with such themes of trivial sentiment, unworthy our nation, our cause, and the hour. You are right, Victor; she shall never have you—the pale-faced English girl. You belong to France. Ah! to-morrow we shall be in arms again; to-morrow we shall renew the struggle. Paris shall be delivered; France shall yet be free; and you are ours. You belong to the Commune—to the Red Republic—to France."

Victor shook his head sadly, and turned slightly away; and, at that moment,—sounds were heard below. Footsteps trod the staircase,—the door burst open,—and a group of men,—including many old acquaintances, entered the room.

"Ah! all is ready," one cried. "Here you are! The cannon rolls to Montmartre; the Prussians leave the town with the dawn of the morning; the people are under arms. But one decisive step to-morrow, one lion-spring, and Paris is in the hands of the Commune; Prussia and Versailles are alike defied, and the glorious flag of Liberty will float upon the ramparts. Paris will belong at last to the Parisians; Paris will be free!"

Old talk; idle, vain, frothing words, but fraught with new significance in these strange latter days.

CHAPTER XL.

THE RULE OF THE RED.

Two months more, and then that was over.

The red flag had waved over Paris; and its followers had done their horrid work.

It was lowered, and the troops of the Tricolor were filing along the Route de Neuilly from Versailles.

What a time it had been, that second siege!—a time of horrors far worse than the first. What a scene was Paris in that beautiful month of May!

The lurid glare rose night and day from her burning buildings; the city streamed with the blood of her ill-fated children; the smoke rolled dense and thick from the petroleum flames of her conflagration, and cannon and shell poured in a ceaseless cataract from every side; and within—in the counsels of the Commune, in the ranks of the army, in the Hotel de Ville, were treachery, cowardice, horrid cruelty, and diabolical deeds.

And yet—and yet the children of the red flag rose to defend Paris, to make one more struggle for the freedom of France. With this motive, and in that vain hope, many joined them, casting themselves into the terrible breach,

Victor Lescar joined them, and others, who were of brave and indomitable spirit like him.

His blood was fired with hope, with the excitement of his new position, with the wild dream that France might yet be conqueror—that from Paris might issue an organized army, inspired with new spirit, powerful to reclaim or—ready to die.

He threw himself into the work, and strove with heart and soul to make delusion reality. Terrible

delusion!—fatal dream! What could the result be but bitter disappointment and the anguish of despair?

Then came days of horror and deeds of darkness, when Paris streamed with blood.

Finally, the column in the Place Vendôme fell; it was nearly over then.—The cannonade continued vigorously from the army of Versailles, and in a few days the troops marched unresisted down the Avenue de Paris, and forced their way by the entrance of the Point du Jour into the town.

Madness raged wilder than ever in the brains of these people of Paris. Petroleum was flung; flames rose higher and higher to the heavens; on all sides were buildings crumbling to the ground; blood flowed unceasingly; the dead crowded the streets; the troops advanced nearer and nearer; the red flag was torn down; the tricolor waved on point after point of the ramparts of the city—and the Commune was no more.

On that day Victor broke his colonel's sword, and flung it from him, and would fight for the Commune no more.

Then his soul sank, sickened with horror, and he flung his sword away.

It was near the end then. The troops of Versailles were fast entering Paris, and the city was in flames.

He had heard the order given; he knew the dark deed about to be committed. In vain he had raised his voice in passionate expostulation; then, mad with despair and horror, he had fled from the Assembly and rushed into the streets.

Shots resounded in the air all around him; shell and cannon ball rolled heavily above his head; the atmosphere was poisoned with the horrid smell of blood and smoking sulphurous fires. The cries of the people rang in a hideous ceaseless echo in his ears, the flames roared towards the blue heavens, and the black smoke rolled against the summer sky.

And here in a little corner, a picturesque bit of old

Paris, where he paused a moment as he fled madly he knew not where, the sun filled the street with soft golden rays, and the broad eaves of an old doorway made a rich shadow upon the stone.

He leaned under it a moment, weary, scarce knowing where to go. He would not fly, he would not desert the cause he had adopted ; and to stay with it, to belong to it, was a bitter shame.

Ah ! would no bullet reach him ?—no burning brand fall upon his head ? Would not death take him, as it took thousands and thousands around him, and hide him from his dishonor and despair ?

Oh, Paris ! Oh, France ! Oh, delusion, defeat, and despair !

He had stood for a moment or for an hour,—which, he was, quite unconscious,—when a footstep, coming towards him, trod suddenly the hot pavement, and its sound roused him as it reached his ear.

It approached : he looked up. Rapidly, steadily, eagerly she came along—Faustine, the red flag upon her shoulder, the fire of fanatic fury glowing upon her face.

She was rushing, he knew not where—from some point where she had waved her fatal standard to some other where she thought it might still with hope be raised.

And she drew near him. They had not met often during the last two months. She had been playing her part ; he had been struggling with his. Her party had been in power all this time ; she had been reigning as a queen in the red Commune. He had last seen her riding by Raoul Regnau, on the day of the proclamation of the Assembly, through the streets of Paris, on a white charger, with a laurel wreath on her brows.

She was a leading spirit in those days of tumult, and seemed fired with a power that was at once fatal and insane.

She rushed along now, waving her red flag, pass-

ing Victor unheeded, and speeding swiftly down the street.

Another moment and she would have been gone. But something impelled him ; he called "Faustine," and she instantly paused.

The voice reached her, and she turned and looked at him as he stood there. She came slowly towards him. The sun-rays fell between them : she paused a moment some paces away. She looked with that strange glitter of madness in her excited eyes.

"Faustine, Faustine !" he cried again.

"Victor !" she answered, and again she paused.

The flag dropped from her shoulder, her eyes softened as they rested wistfully on his face ; she held out her hands to him, she drew near him, and her lips parted to speak again, but again suddenly—she paused.

What is coming ? Hark ! the rush of many footsteps, shouts of people, the crash of falling houses : the ring of rifle-shot draws nearer, nearer, and still more near. One second, one rush, and the street is full of the flying populace and the charging soldiers of Versailles.

She turns, she waves her red flag ; Victor starts forward, and looks wildly round. Good God ! they are firing on the people, they are driving them before them like sheep ; they are pouring their shot into the sun-lit streets, and the children of Paris are falling like the corn beneath the reapers' hand.

Ah ! that flying struggling mass ; it was too awful. Many fell smitten at their feet ; a few streamed past them and fled on.

He shouts ; he waves his hand.

"*Courage, mes amis !*" she cries, as she rears her flag ; and, firm and unshrinking, the two stand side by side.

The flying crowds troop past them ; the soldiers are near ; rifles are levelled, and scores of fixed bayonets are advancing close on them. They shout to

the flying people : they stand firm. She waves the red flag; he wears the uniform of the National Guard.

It was more than enough—far more. The soldiers were near them now. A moment, and one rifle is raised. A soldier of Versailles, he but does his duty ; he bent his aim on that uniform of the Commune.

An instant—a shout—the sharp crack of the rifle ringing high above the rest, and, higher than all, there rends the summer air the bitter echo of a woman's cry, as the red flag fell forgotten on the pavement, and Faustine sprang to Victor's side—as the tumult dies away, and the smoke clears, and *he* is seen to stand there untouched, unwounded, bearing the sinking form he has caught upon his breast. The bullet was meant for him ; but,—as she sprang forward,—it had pierced her in his stead.

The soldiers of Versailles still rush on them : he is their prisoner. They surround him, and she is torn roughly from his arms.

"Ha, ma foi ! ma belle pétroleuse !" cried the rough tones. *"En avant, mon ami, en avant !"*

She is dead, apparently ; well, thousands are dead in that city, besides her, to-day. What matter ? Fling her rudely aside. He is their prisoner,—away !

But he wrenches himself from their grasp ; he springs forward as that beautiful form, that grand dark face, pallid with the grey hue of death, is laid low upon the ground. He utters a bitter cry, as he struggles to free himself from his captors and reach her side. In vain : they lay rough hold on him ; a dozen rifles point close to his head,—a moment, one struggle more, and all were over for him as well.

But another voice is raised at that moment, and there springs suddenly forward from the ranks of Versailles a young officer in the rich uniform of the old Cent Gardes.

He darts by Victor, and, with a cry of bitter sorrow, he flings himself by Faustine's side.

"Ah," he cries, *"the rose—the damask rose of the*

Place St. Etienne! Faustine—the fairest flower of Paris! Faustine—have they slain you too? Go,” he continued, turning upon his soldiers, “leave me; take him prisoner. I will follow you. Go.”

“Eugène de Valéry!” exclaimed Victor.

“Lescar, mon ami. Ah, Dieu!——”

He sprang towards his old friend for one moment. But it was unsafe to say more.

“Go,” he cried, and they hurried on from him; and he bent again, and wound his arm round Faustine’s unconscious form.

“She is not dead,” he murmured; “no,” and he listened eagerly as the faint breath fluttered on her lips. “There is time—there is time. I may save her still. Ah! the damask rose! Ah! la belle! Ah! Faustine, has hell broken loose upon earth?”

He wound his strong arms round her, he raised her from the earth, and he bore her along swiftly through the deserted back streets, while the flames still roared, and the cannon growled, and the shots rang, while the populace fell and perished, or shouted and fled.

He bore her along until the Avenue de Boulogne was passed, and burning Paris behind them; he bore her until he reached the Point du Jour, where stood the Ambulance of Versailles.

“*She* can save her,” he murmured, as he sped along, “if any can. *She* will save her, surely,” he continued, as his eyes turned to the pallid face upon his shoulder, as his arm trembled under the unconscious weight he bore. “*She* will save her for France!”

He reached the Ambulance; he carried her in; he laid her on a low pallet, and bent over her beautiful dark face with drops of horror and anguish upon his own.

“Has it come to this!” he murmured again. “We shoot brothers, sisters; we shoot right and left; we shoot our loves, we kill our flowers of beauty—the very women for whom we would have given our lives.”

He stayed till he saw kind eyes bending over Faustine with eager concern. He stayed till he could give his charge to those who he knew would care for her. He committed her with sorrowing words of despair.

"There was not one man," he said, "in that company who would not once have given the best blood in his heart for Faustine, our rose, our darling—our lamask rose, our dark beautiful queen. Has hell broken loose, I say? Have we all become devils? Take care of her," he uttered again, ere he left her. "Save her for Paris; save her, save her, if you can."

Then he went his way again, back to Paris.

"She will be saved, if anything can save her," he murmured, as he hurried to his post. "Faustine! the beautiful rose of the Place St. Etienne. Ah, horrors! Thank God, who is merciful, she is in good hands now."

And so she was; for the face that bent over Faustine, as she lay unconscious, with the grey pallor of death upon her cheek, was the kind, earnest countenance of Madame Prioleau.

CHAPTER XLI.

TAKEN AMONG THORNS.

It was said that, after this, to enter Paris was like visiting a city of the dead.

Men who had not been there since the bright days of the summer months of last year, and returned to it now, found there a change, a desolation, terrible beyond words.

It was strange and terrible to find sunny corners in that fair city, where one had seen the bright fire

crackling on the hearthstone of some happy home, where the smiles of children had been familiar, where old age had sat in honored peace,—to go there and see the charred and falling house, the desolate hearth exposed through the chasms in the broken wall, the paper hanging torn and ragged, the empty, wretched desolation and despair.

There were thousands of such homes in Paris in that summer-time,—thousands of such deserted hearths,—thousands of such perished and ruined lives.

Such is always the work of war. Such had been, alas! in Paris the work of worse than war—of frenzy, of deception, of bloodthirsty ruffianism, of horrors untold.

And now it was over, and the city was desolate. She had been swept by cannon, consumed by fire, wasted by famine; her children had perished in her midst, and men who paced her dreary streets now, looked round as if in some hideous dream.

Piers Ashton felt thus, as, immediately the second siege was raised, the Commune over, and Paris in the hands of the government of Versailles, he entered the city to seek eagerly for that friend, dear to him as a brother, and for many an old associate of past sunny days.

He sought in vain. He rushed, frenzied with dismay and terror, here and there. A shell had carried the roof from the old house in the Place St. Etienne during the last bombardment, since the death of Auber Dax.

There was nothing to be heard of them, nobody to question, there.

His old hotel in the Rue Rivoli was an hospital, full from ceiling to basement with wounded soldiers—a terrible scene of suffering and death.

He scoured Paris, as many did in those days, to seek vainly for his friends. He was sick with horror and dismay as he paced the streets, as he sought his friends here and there in vain. He went from hospital

to hospital; he asked for name after name he had known in former times—names he thought might be links in the tracing chain towards his friend. In vain he asked; dead they seemed, all of them; fallen in a sortie, shot in the street, perished of their wounds, died of disease,—all gone!

Piers went to a friend whose name he found high in authority in the Versailles council, and from him he at last obtained a pass of permission to enter for inquiry among the prisoners.

The lists were still being made up,—their interminable length was increasing every hour; the lists of these men, women, and children, rebels, “incendiaires,” and “pétroleuses”—a dense throng, as doomed, every one of them, as their brothers and sisters of Paris who had fallen in her blood-stained streets.

He obtained sufficient influence to gain permission to scan that fatal list, eagerly, breathlessly, fearfully, but at last with a cry of joy. Yes, there it was—the name he had loved through many a year,—the name of his friend, his companion, through days of study, through years of travel, through wanderings of thought. He lived still: he was a prisoner, and appointed for trial; as good as condemned, but he lived. His name was on that list—Victor Lescar.

But there was no Faustine,—she was still un-found; and Henri Tolberg and old Colonel de Lescar, and Bouchet and Luchêne and Rochecarre—God only knew where they all were.

Then followed many weeks when the trials in the riding-school when on, and the dismal executions at Satory began; and all through those weeks Piers was struggling for permission to penetrate those dread prison walls, and to look on the face of that friend he loved, but all in vain.

Many weeks passed, and many trials were over, and many a Communist sent to his account, before at length, through influence won for him by Sir John Graeme from high quarters at home—at last the per-

mission came. He might visit Victor for a sin hour.

It was one of those moments of life in which every power of intense and contending emotion seems compressed into one throb of pain, when the door opened at the end of the long dreary passage, and Piers and Victor stood once more face to face.

He was sitting at his little table when Piers entered, catching the last ray of light that fell through the grated window high up in the wall. He sat bending over his writing; a confusion of books, and maps, and papers lay before him; and, as the door opened, he did not move.

He thought it only his accustomed visitor—only the gaoler with his portion of evening food—and he sat still, his fair head bending close and eager over his table, his fingers moving rapidly across the extended map.

A hand on his shoulder, and he had sprung instantly to his feet; and—he saw, through the dim and dusky light, who stood beside him. A moment he gazed, half realizing, half startled; and then his lips quivered with the nervous tremor of a woman, his eyes brightened, his face, so wan and pale, flushed with a vivid color as he stretched forth both his hands, and, with one broken cry of joy, he fell forward, and his head dropped on his friend's broad breast.

"My friend, my brother!" he exclaimed.

"Victor at last! My God, at last!"

They wrung each other's hands again and again in intense and speechless agitation.

Such moments are too strong, too deep for words; and then Victor sank on the wooden chair again, leaned his arms upon the back, and looked up for a moment, with an expression of unspeakable love and gratitude, into the dark face that bent over him, all quivering with tenderness and regret.

There seemed still no words to say. Victor's lips

moved as if to speak, but they only trembled. He struggled for an instant, and then he turned away and leaned his elbows on the table, covered his face with his hands, and his frame shook with the fierce effort for self-possession. Piers could only lay his hand on his shoulder, and look down upon him, and wait.

"Oh, Piers," he said at length, "to see you again ! Look away from me ; leave me a moment. I am ashamed of my weakness ; but I feel as if I could have borne *anything* better than the face of a friend."

"Dear fellow !" Piers murmured.

"Sit down, Piers. There, it is over now. You came so suddenly, and it is so long since I have seen any face I love ; not since—— O God ! O God ! how terrible it has been !"

"Terrible indeed !"

"Talk to me, Piers ; tell me about every one, about all of them. First tell me, for God's sake, have you found Faustine ?"

Piers shook his head.

"I cannot find a trace of her," he said.

Victor's head sank again.

"It is so, then, it is so. She is really dead ; and yet——"

"Dead ?" exclaimed Piers, in tones ringing with horror—"dead ? Faustine !"

"I fear so, I fear so ; and—she fell for me."

Piers heaved a low sigh, almost a sob ; his heart was sick with horror of it all. And now Faustine too !

Victor looked up at him, with a deep color on his cheek and a strange expression in his eyes as he spoke of her.

"Yes," he went on, "she must be dead, if you cannot find her. Poor, brave, wild girl ! True, strong-hearted to the last, Piers, she stood by my side in that terrible charge ; she stood firm and true. I saw it, good God ! I saw the soldiers fire ; and it was *meant* for me. She must be dead ; and yet I do not

think so, for I heard Eugène de Valéry's word they dragged me away. Stay ; the Versailles hospital ! Have you tried that ? I know he would have had her carried there. Eugène would have saved her if there was any life to save. Seek her in the hospital at Versailles, Piers. God grant she may still be spared in life !”

“I will, I will. I never thought of going there. I have inquired in every possible place in Paris—a every hospital, almost at every house : I never thought of Versailles.”

“Go there,” said Victor. “If she lives, she is in that hospital ; Eugène would have sent her there. Poor Eugène ! I wonder if he fell. There was fighting for hours after they took me. He may have been shot down ; but, if he lives still, find him out. Captain of the old Cent Gardes, he knows the fate of our poor Faustine.”

“It is all too dreadful,” Piers sighed ; “and, Victor, Victor, I have but a few minutes to be with you. Tell me of yourself : what is the prospect—what is the hope ?”

“There is no hope,” said Victor firmly ; “the prospect has but one side. I stand accused, as deserter from the Government force, as defender of Montmartre, as war-delegate of the Commune, as member of the Assembly General. There is not the slightest hope.”

“Victor, you ! Impossible !”

“Friend, give me courage,” he said. “France has died, France has shed her best blood ; why should mine be spared ? Piers, I try not to think of it all, not to unnerve myself by the contemplation of what must be. I am happy in here, in my own way—quite happy, I tell you, sometimes. I write : look, I have not so much ready. It will be left behind me ; and perhaps, although my life has done so much harm, there may be a little good in what I am leaving here. I have my maps—I can explain all I wished once

so much that they would try to do ; and I have here, Piers," he continued, putting his hand to the chain and locket that hung round his neck,—“I cannot speak of that yet—not of them, of her ; but another day, when I am stronger, when you come again. I have things to say, but not now ; no, I cannot now.”

He stopped a moment : even the slight reference had brought a deadlier pallor to his cheek—a tremor to his lip—a rush of tears to his eyes.

“I cannot speak of them to-day,” he continued, putting his hand up to his forehead with a weary movement ; “but, tell me in one word, are they well?”

“Well,” said Piers, bowing his head gravely ; “both are well, both sad—sad, but well.”

“Look, send her this, will you ? I have written it all for her ; it is a great deal—quite a packet, but you will not mind. They would not allow me to send it before ; but they will let you take it with you, I know. Give it to her. Sad—and I—— Oh, I cannot, cannot speak of her : I must be strong.”

“My friend, my friend,” cried Piers bitterly.

“Hush !” said Victor. “Stay ! the time is nearly over ; but you will come again, Piers?”

“Yes, I think they will let me. I will write to London to-night.”

“Will you ? My love, oh, my love to her. What have I brought her but sadness ? What has my life done but harm ? It is well I should die ; it is well.”

“Good God ; you shall not die !” cried Piers ; “you must not—it is impossible ! Victor, they *cannot* do it.”

“They will,” he said gravely. “My friend, it is but a question of time. But come to me again, as often as they will let you. Only, Piers, do not unnerve me ; be strong, when you come, and make me strong. I must bear it ; I must die as thousands have died. Why is it worse for me than for them ? They all had friends—friends, and children, and parents, and dear, dear loves, and they all died ; and we led them

to death, and we inspired them to struggle ; we must not shrink from death in our turn. But help me to be strong. Let us have happy hours together for the little while that remains. I *can* be strong, you see I can, save when I think of her, and when I think of Faustine, and when I remember—France.”

He would have said more, but a rough voice broke in upon them——

“*Messieurs, allons !* the time is up.”

And Piers must go.

Once more they wrung each other's hands, once more they looked with the passionate agony of wistful regret into each other's faces, and then the door was closed behind Piers, and he left his friend alone—alone in his dismal cell, alone with his books and his maps and his papers, alone, alas ! also, with sad memories, hopeless prospects, and vain regrets.

The next morning Piers was standing in the Bureau of the Versailles hospital, holding unexpected converse with a dear old friend—with Madame Prioleau, who had much to tell ; nothing, however, but sad news.

Faustine was dead : the passionate heart was still ; the eager fiery spirit was at rest. She had rallied, she had spoken, she had known Madame Prioleau ; but then she had sunk again, and died.

“It is well,” she said ; “she is spared all results of her wild rash deeds ; she is spared the disgraceful trial and all the terrible possibilities that might have ensued : she is at rest ; and there was no other rest for her, for that restless nature, for that passionate heart, and—knowing all, as I now know, I cannot regret her—my poor Faustine !”

“You mean all of—her history ?”

“Of her heart,” Madame Prioleau answered. “Did you know, did any one know, what in these few days she unveiled to me ?”

“I knew,” Piers said gravely ; and he looked down on the ground, while a deep color dyed his cheek. “I

thought it long, long ago, but I never felt sure ; perhaps only because I did not wish the assurance," he added, as the memory swept over him of those old, old days, of the lesson he had learned of his heart and nature, in that cynical *nil admirari* youth of his, from the beauty and the power of Faustine. He was silent—it seemed sacrilege now, to speak of the secrets of the heart that was still.

"I speak," said Madame Prioleau, at length, answering as if she read his thoughts, "because you see *him*, and I, alas ! may do so no more. She sent him her love, her last love, if he still lived to receive it, and the message of her faith in his King."

"In his King ?" repeated Piers.

"Yes ; the end was great peace. She lit up wonderfully one night, and that was what she wished to say. 'Victor was right,' she exclaimed, 'we must have a King ;' and she believed in Victor's. She died in perfect confidence in the coming kingdom and the peace-bringing King."

"Faustine ! Faustine ! Poor, beautiful Faustine !" Piers murmured.

"Yes, it was very sad," answered Madame Prioleau. "She was very beautiful to the very end ; and Eugène de Valéry and others, who found that she lay here, brought flowers, quantities of them, for their damask rose ; and she lay at last covered with the rich scented profusion which young Valéry said she had always loved. But she did not notice them much : her mind was full of Victor ; of old sayings of his ; of memories of long ago."

CHAPTER XLII.

IT CANNOT BE.

THE next few weeks were, perhaps, in their influence upon his character and his future, the most telling in all Piers Ashton's life.

They were spent in watching that trial, in aiding, with futile effect, the efforts of sympathetic and eager friends; spent in stirring up interest and concern for Victor on every possible side; spent in writing those weary, painful letters to London; spent in hurried short visits to Victor's cell.

The permission for these was still accorded to him; but he gained nothing more.

He grew frantic with suspense and terror of results, as time went on. He thought of every possible and impossible step; of an appeal to the British Government to win interference on Victor's behalf; of forcing himself into the council-chamber of Versailles, and flinging himself, to crave his friend's salvation, at the President's feet. Every kind of mad scheme occurred to him. He thought even of an effort to excite the exhausted populace to a forcible resistance in Victor's cause. Every sort of frantic idea crossed his mind, and such seemed alike in vain.

Meantime these terrible trials went on; executions were the daily occurrence at Satory, and the railways were laden with prisoners transported to fortresses far and near. The Communist trials—they were the one subject of discussion, during that period of horror, in every paper, upon every side.

Apparently; for Piers's utmost efforts and all friendly intercessions continued in vain.

Victor was to die; stern military justice demanded *it*; he must fall a sacrifice to the rigor of military

etiquette and rule. Die, though stained by no foul crime of the Commune ; die, though his hands were pure of his brother-Frenchmen's blood. He must die !

Bitter was the anguish of Piers's heart through the futile efforts of these months. He struggled on, and public opinion was all with him ; even the press, at home and abroad—in France, Germany, England, in all which countries Victor's name was known. The press protested ; it was shocking, men said, that one so young, so brave, so gifted, should be doomed, like a felon, to die ; horrible, that Lescar, whose defence (borne out by many a witness who would vouch for his tale) showed his short military career to have been one of devotion, brave, able, and efficient, to his country's cause,—Lescar, the true patriotism of whose young spirit was shown in every line he had ever written, ever deed he had ever done,—Lescar, whom none could accuse of any crime, save maddened and empoisoned love of France—he must die !

They tried, and condemned him.

During these bitter months, the most painful hours to Piers Ashton were always those spent over his letters to London—letters that could never carry any message, save the faintest encouragement to hope.

His sweetest hours, after the first shock of their meeting, were spent in that cell with Victor, where, as the officials grew to know him, he was allowed to linger for a more lengthened visit day by day.

They talked often now of many an old theory, of many a delusive dream. They compared impressions formed from experience ; they struggled to catch a sure, true light upon life. Of the keen pain of the parting in the near future they said little ; of the deepest pain of all, the young heart in England, that was knit to Victor's in tenderest love, they never spoke but once. Victor could not do it ; it was the one memory that unmanned him—the one thing in life of which the thought robbed him of his courage to die. They did not speak of her, but in silence Piers

gave him her daily letters, and received his answers in return.

But of many other things they spoke ; and many memories remained to linger with Piers through all his life to come, from many a scene in that cell, and from many a conversation they had together there.

It was strange, interesting, and sad to watch, day by day, the changeful vibrations of a spirit like Victor's, full of energy and activity of thought, and keenly sensitive and susceptible, during the solitude and sorrow of those dreary months.

The working of his mind seemed, if possible, more rapid and more brilliant than ever, as he sat through those dreary hours, and waited through those solitary days.

He spoke much on military subjects, and wrote on them as well. He wished, he said, to leave some comprehensible explanation to the outer world that might justify the spirit and conduct of that handful of young officers who, with him, had protested, rebelled, and finally acted against the counsels and leadership of the generals at Metz, Tours, or Nevers.

Often, again, Piers found him deep in earnest and difficult thought, as he struggled to solve the enigma of his own chequered life, fraught, as it was, spite all its success, with such fatal error and with such mistaken zeal.

This was the thought that most absorbed him, not so much as it regarded himself,—he forgot himself then, as always, when fascinated with an idea ; and it was more, as *his* errors in their essence existed, and affected the age he lived in, the people he loved, the future he struggled to penetrate,—that these errors interested him as a profound study in themselves.

The conclusions on this subject were, as ever, misty and difficult for many a day ; and while *he* gathered in every direction thoughts and fancies for his consolation, amid all this confusion of delusion and mistake, to Piers for long no light rose anywhere ; all seemed

difficult and mysterious ; all seemed failure and folly, and to call for nothing, on Victor's account, but regretful repentance and hopeless despair.

But he found him again and again so bright, so absorbed, seemingly so oblivious for the time being, that again and again he crushed back his own sufferings, concealed the efforts he was making, and the failure that ensued, answered Victor's inquiries with a few words of hope and encouragement, and then allowed himself to be drawn into the moment's mood.

He could not shadow that eager spirit deeper than need be with the darkness of his own apprehension and despair.

One evening only it was different.

December had come ; and it was one night among quite the latter days, that Piers came to Victor, entering the little room as the darkness was gathering, as the light that fell through the narrow window grew misty and dim.

As he entered, he found his friend had tossed aside his maps and papers, and was sitting in solitary idleness.

Piers started. Victor's aspect was unusual, and filled him with an instant rush of apprehension and surprise.

He scarcely moved as Piers entered ; his whole attitude expressed a degree of depression of hope and spirit such as Piers had never surprised him in before.

"Victor," he said twice before his friend looked up.

The light was grey and shadowy in the cell now, and the gaoler had not yet brought his miserable lamp ; but Piers could see clearly enough to realize, when Victor raised his face, that it was paler even than usual, and that his expression was heavy and laden with unwonted feeling. Evidently he had gone through to-day some unusual agitation or paroxysm of grief and despair.

"My dear friend," Piers said, as he sat down near him, and leaned his arm on the little wooden table.

"Victor!" he looked into the other's face, and waited for him to speak.

Victor could say nothing, and there was still in countenance that look of trouble and pain.

It overcame Piers; he could not stand it.

He seemed to find here always, in this dismal room his one encouragement, his brightness, his continual gleam of hope—the only thing that helped him to go through with it all, to go forth and struggle against failure again.

And if Victor gave way? If Victor had lost courage if his brave spirit had broken down, then it was of Piers could hide no longer his own agony of despair.

"Victor! Victor!" he cried, and he covered his face with his hands. "What have we done? What have we done? Good God! what miserable, fearful error bewitched us? I cannot bear it, Victor—end—this end for you!"

"For me?" Victor said, rousing himself at length as his friend spoke, and uttering the words in a half-wandering voice—"for me, Piers? My good friend, are you mourning for me?"

"My friend, my friend!"

"And do you think that you find me sad because I realize, and cannot face, my doom?"

"Victor, hush, for God's sake!"

"And do you know," he went on interrupting, "you are right so far; I do realize? But in just this Piers, do not credit me with cowardice. Do not think this is the paleness of terror on my cheek, or that look on the trace of tears of self-compassion and fear. No, no; listen to me first, and hear who has spent this day with me, and then you will understand what bitter thoughts have been mine. Pasteur Dallou has been with me," he went on, "the old St. Martin's pasteur, whom I used to know so well in days of long ago. He was the Protestant pasteur, and of course mother's. He was her spiritual counsellor and dearest friend; and he came a long way to see

Piers, for he had left St. Marteau years ago. He has travelled up through all the broken lines and the troubled country from a far corner of France to visit me. He started directly the papers told him of my arrest. And here he has been to-day; and he came with a stern message; he came with a voice and a doctrine that recalled days gone by. He is a Protestant, as I tell you, puritan of the strictest school, and he came as to the son of his old friend, as to a lost child of his flock, as to one plunged in lifelong error and darkness, and standing at the gates of death stained with foulest crime. He is a gentle-voiced old man, Piers, stern in spirit, but tender of heart. I have loved him, but he never understood me, and he has mourned over me my whole life long. He and my mother looked on Dax and his followers (worshippers of Reason, as Dax professed himself to be) with horror and repulsion as children of darkness; and my father's fancy for their society gave my mother bitter pain. She dreaded the whole thing for me; and God knows the result showed some reason for her fears. And now, speaking in her words, echoing, as he himself says, her voice that has been hushed so long, Pasteur Dallon came to me to-day, and, as a Communist, he called me to repent. I made him listen to my tale, and he heard me patiently. He left me in a changed spirit, and rejoiced that he still could bless—my mother's son. He left me asking my pardon, because he had thought it in me to do such deeds; he left me comforted by his visit, for there is something wonderful, Piers, in the touch, at an hour like this, of old familiar hands you have loved in childhood laid in prayer and blessing upon your head. But he left me with the thoughts that paled my cheek as you came in, and brought those tears that still burn in my eyes—tears of regret, tears of sorrow, tears of remorse."

"You meant well; from the very beginning you meant well."

"Yes ; that is what I have been saying to myself always ; and that is what I have hugged to myself in extenuation of every result. But to-night that old man made me realize it ; to-night he has made me feel—I *deserve* to die."

"You, Victor ? impossible !"

"Yes, I shall die," he said firmly ; "and I deserve it. I always confessed I did from a military point of view. I did so from the first ; but he showed me myself in another light, and made me realize the nature of my sin. Listen, Piers: he made me feel bitterly the result of actions,—the undying, ever-reviving, ever-reappearing fruits of an evil deed ; that it is, as he expressed it, verily a living seed, cast for good or evil upon the ground. He made me feel the dreadful thing I have done ; he called me to realize its results on nations,—on humanity, on all sides and on all ages to come. It is undying. Alas ! we cannot blot its memory from the history of men ; it stands—the Paris Commune—an example, a precedent, horrible and revolting indeed, but fraught with bitter possibilities, through all the world's future, in its results. And I—joined it :—I must *die*."

"And yet you meant so well all your life long, in every thought, in every action. What *have* you done but good ? What have you wished but the well-being, the regeneration of your fellow-men ? I took part with you, Vic. Your thoughts and theories, and your mistakes are mine."

"Nay, dear friend ; my lesson is your lesson, and you learn in time what I learn too late. I see it all now. I acknowledge many things I repudiated in days gone by."

"You learn a deeper lesson in the '*vanitas vanitatum*,' " sighed Piers in bitterness of spirit.

"No ; more than that. I realize that no theory, however sublime and however high soaring, is of any value unless founded on fact."

"Piers," he continued with sudden change of tone

"*you* will love the people, and you will live for the people, as we always meant to do, even if I am gone ; and you will have a helper, you know,—a guide."

"Yes ; *she* is farther on than we are, Vic. She wishes to *do* just as we wish ; and she has found means already to do more than talk."

"Together you will do much. I tried to tell Pasteur Dallon something of our old dreams to-day, and he understood me a little. He says the great error was thinking we had a universal work to do. He says, and it is true, I see, that no man can put the world to rights, as we used to be so fond of expressing it. He says it is all right where—I hope, I am going ; but here we can only *help* a little, with what is altogether wrong. You will do that, and Donna will assist you. You will go back to your own positions—your right position destined for you, Piers, that but for my misleading, you should have occupied from the first."

"Back to confess the delusions of a lifetime," said Piers, bitterly again, "that society was too much for us ; that we are fixed in our positions with chains too strong to be wrenched away ; that the idea of Communism as we meant it, of brotherhood and equality as we saw it taught in the doctrines of Christianity and in the example of Christ, was a delusion, a wild dream that has led us by its fatal beauty, drawn us with its fascination to your destruction and to the ruin of your life !"

"How it helps one, Piers, to lift the soul out of one's miserable little unit of existence, one's own single individuality of fate, or destiny, to think of all these things largely, as they affect nations, the world, and the age. I like to think of it all in this way ; and it is only sad when I turn to France. Ah ! Piers, for a heart for France ! Wayward, capricious, passionate France ! who will fix her affections ? who will captivate and hold her changeful love ? When will she *learn the beauty of fidelity* ? When will she believe

in the national glory, with which truth, constancy, devotion, in a word, *loyalty* of heart, towers before the eyes of the world and of history, an anchor of safety, and a rock of strength above all these tossings, turbulent and stormy, which must ever describe the vast surging ocean of a nation's life. Ah ! Piers, is that your summons ? We have talked much to-night ; and now our little hour is over. The time is quickly spent : farewell, my friend, farewell !”

That was the only evening Piers ever found him sad.

December came. Again his name was brought up ; again pleading, protest, and intercession were unavailing ; again his condemnation was pronounced—and this was final. Hope was gone.

All this time Gaie had written but one unchanging wish—to come to him.

But in these early days after the Commune, Sir John felt truly that Paris was no fit place, even under these peculiar circumstances, to which to bring his two girls.

Even Victor himself begged they might not come to Paris—at least not at first. He knew the state of Paris ; he knew the scenes it presented ; knew the shocks of horror any heart must receive. He wished them away from Paris—as far as possible away ; that was his desire, through the months of his confinement.

But, as the end drew near, as it became evident that hope was in vain, and that effort in his behalf was futile, a change came over him, and the longing became strong that he might see her—just see her once again.

He told this wish to Piers one evening, as they sat together, and as the moment approached when the gaoler's voice would disturb them with its order to go.

“So will *you* write, then, Piers, and say something to Sir John to help me, that he may let her come ?”

“It is but a few hours to London,” Piers answered.
“I will fetch them myself. I know my uncle will

bring them : I know he will let them come. Do not fear, Victor ; by to-morrow night they will be in Paris."

"Thanks, thanks, my friend. Ah ! I should like dearly to see her. And Piers, it will not do to delay ; it may be any morning now."

"I will go to-night," Piers answered. "There is still time to catch the mail. Vic., do not be discouraged : keep up heart. I will not lose a moment. Before I come to you again, they will be in Paris. I will go over to-night."

And Piers went.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THINKING MUSIC.

"LET me go to him ; let me go to him !"

Such had been for many months Gaie's constant cry.

"My darling, it is not fit for you to go there," was always Sir John's reply. "See, he does not wish it himself."

And he turned away to hide his emotion ; for his eyes could not bear to rest on his little sunny daughter, so crushed as she was by despair.

If he could have foreseen all this, he murmured often to himself, truly Lady Curzon Kellam would have had more of her way.

It was almost happiness when Piers at last arrived to fetch them. They were to go. She was to see him ; and she shut her eyes to what lay beyond. It was almost happiness : they were all to go.

They reached Paris late in the evening, and Piers saw Victor that night.

He was rejoiced they had come, he said. That very morning he had thought his turn had come at last; and he knew not by what chance others were taken in his stead.

It was a matter of a few days more, they all knew; still the Council delayed the last order, and still the country and the press rang with protestations against his doom.

But it was decreed to be. To be—to be, and yet delayed; and dreary days passed, while permission was sought for his friends' admittance to his cell.

Morning after morning Piers hurried with the dawn of light to that prison; eager was his first question, painful the intensity of his suspense, as he conned over the name-list of the day, which he bribed the officials somehow to show to him. Painful the gasp of relief that broke from him, morning after morning, as he saw that name was absent—Victor not yet among the doomed.

The sisters had been many days in Paris, when at length the permission reached them.

It was late one evening. The dark December day had long closed in, when an official came from Versailles to Sir John Graeme, bearing an answer, at length, to his repeated appeal.

"The *condamné* Victor Lescar, *numero* 1773, might see his friends from England to-night."

Sir John saw him, and wept as a man would weep over a gallant son, as he met the clear blue eyes, and looked into the delicate face, pale and worn indeed, but yet calm, brave, and resigned.

"Forgive me Gaie's tears," he had said.

"My boy, my poor boy!" had been Sir John's only answer, as his own tears fell fast over his rugged cheek.

"There is no hope," Victor had said calmly.

"None, none, my dear boy. Farewell!"

"I deserve to die; as a soldier my death is just," he had continued.

Yes, perhaps, as the voice of the world was saying at that moment ; and yet—could he not be spared for France ?

“ They will not let me see you again,” he had continued to Sir John.

“ I fear not, my boy. Farewell, farewell !”

It was near midnight when they had arrived in answer to that message of permission, and it was very late when the door opened again, which had closed behind Sir John—and Victor, who sat struggling to recover his composure after that long farewell, turned to see the figure slight and small he knew so well, to see the veil thrown back that hung over her fair face, and to realize that for one more moment of life he saw Gaie again.

She came in so quietly ; she looked up at him with a sweet, strange smile. The scene was so unfamiliar to her—the small, dark room, the flickering light, the agile form that sprang up as she entered, the pale wan face, the bright recognition in his eyes—she saw it all.

She stood silent, she looked up, she answered his bright smile ; then he sprang forward, and she was folded close in his arms.

“ You have come, Gaie !”

“ Victor !”

The door was closed then, as those who stood behind her drew back. They saw the recognition ; they heard the exclamation, glad, full of mingled pain and joy ; and then they drew back and shut the door on those short moments of struggling anguish and love.

One hour, and the door opened again. One bitter, bitter struggle—one last sweet word—one moment he held her close as they all stood there. And then—he scarce knew what he did, as the gaoler’s voice was heard—rough, kindly, but monotonous and determined—as Sir John came forward, as Donna and Piers stood somewhere behind, and as he realized that *the form he laid gently in Sir John’s arms was quite*

unconscious. She had fainted away utterly from all pain or life for the moment, and could not return the agonized pressure of his last kiss as he murmured once more—farewell. .

They bore her away ; the rough, monotonous voice spoke again. It meant not unkindly ; but these scenes were passing in every cell around him just then ; they must be all got through, there was but a little time for each. "*En avant ! The hour is up !*"

They bore her out. Victor could see Piers bend to help Sir John to carry her ; he could catch a soft gleam on Donna's sad, tear-stained face ; then the door closed on them and he was alone.

A cry, unuttered, seemed to struggle with the anguish in his soul. She was gone from him ! Torn from him ; shut out from his sight ; gone from him for ever ; and he?—was caged like a beast of the desert here ! He would be led forth, only to die.

He did not fear death—he had braved it many and many a time, through these past months, since he had left her. Braved it, knowing that each instant might bring it on swift wings.

He was broken down, and he lay weeping with fierce violence. He was overwhelmed at last—he lay shrinking from the horror of his doom.

It was a terrible storm that broke over him ; the bitterest hour of all his life was passed in that struggle then. He had lost courage and lost submission. The lustre of all heavenly hope was hidden for these moments in dense gloom. He lay, and the sobs shook his frame as with child-like passion and anguish.

And as he lay, his face buried in his hands, his eyes hidden from the darkness, there came to him gradually sweet memories chasing his despair. Old, old memories—first, of long ago, of sunny gardens in the Grand St. Marteau, of water trickling from the fountain in the summer evenings in the squares—memories in which soothing music seemed to mingle with mystic power. "Thinking music" was an old

expression of his, by which he had often described the influence of harmonic rhythm that flowed sometimes over his soul.

He lay "thinking music" now, almost unconscious at length from intense exhaustion from the weight of sorrow which had crushed him down.

He lay "thinking music" until there came slowly to him the memory of one night in the happy past, when they had gone, he and Piers with Donna and Gaie, to hear the *Elijah* in the midst of their London wanderings, and he seemed to see again as he lay there the bright sweet face that had looked upwards to his ; he seemed to meet the light in her shadowy eyes as the music streamed in grand chorus or soft melody above them, and as he (quite familiar with every part) translated the meaning for her of each changing bar.

It dropped into mystic, dreamy reverie, the memory of these echoing words—they mingled with his vision, they whispered in the sweet voice he loved, they caressed his spirit, soothed his anguish and his rebellious pain. He slept.

The morning broke in upon him, lying on that wretched pallet, the grey streaks fell across his fair, wavy hair, across his face, wasted and pallid, on the sweet calm expression of the parted lips, as, with his head thrown back wearily on his arm, he lay there and—slept. He slept as Argyle slept, as many have slept on the eve of a violent death, many whose hearts were as pure as his, whose souls were as noble and resigned ; slept the sleep which He giveth, the great Comforter of men, the sleep He denied only to Himself—the sleep with which He seems to soothe for his children that hour of bitterness beneath which He even quailed ; the hour of the horror of anticipation, the hour of the fainting heart, of the struggling submission of the agonized cry, "If it be possible—spare."

He lived, and slept not through these hours of anguish,—the great Saviour of humanity ; He endured

the bitter struggle, He shed the drops of agony and spirit-pain.

Surely it is in deepest sympathy and tenderest recollection, that in this bitter hour it has been found so often that—"He giveth his beloved sleep."



CHAPTER XLIV.

YET THE TIME SHALL COME.

THE grey dawn of the cold winter morning was breaking in the far east, and the two sisters sat still, as they had been sitting through the night, keeping a weary, anxious watch—watching because they could not rest.

When they had brought Gaie home, scarce revived from the long faint in which she had sank as Victor held her in the agony of his last farewell, she had sat down in an arm-chair by the closed window, and Donna had knelt on the floor by her side.

Donna had wound her arms round her, and she gazed with intense eagerness, with an agony of grief and anxiety, on the sweet face so quivering and pale, and she felt as she knelt there as though her heart would break in her pain for Gaie, in her sorrow for the brave young brother, promised, but never to be hers, in her anguish of grief over the intense sadness of the whole tale.

Gaie, Gaie, their bright beautiful darling! She would gladly have given her life to have spared her this pain.

For many hours she refused to lie down to rest; but she sat there repeating again and again to Donna the last few words that Victor had said, repeating his expression of undying hope, his confidence in an eternal future, his strength to die.

"He said, Donna, it is right—he must die. Justice, military justice, requires it; but oh! it is sad—it is very sad!"

"Terribly sad, darling! God give us all strength to bear his will. God help you, my own love!"

"He says he has pursued a phantom his whole life long—his society, you know—his idea about universal love and brotherhood. A beautiful phantom—was it not, Donna? And now he is dying for his dream, because he thought he would find it realized when power came to them in Paris. And he thought he would save France—and, oh! he was so deceived. He was in error, Donna; he did wrong, he says it was wrong, and it is for his mistake—he must die."

"My darling, he may still be spared; still—still—they may let him live."

"He does not think so," said Gaie.

And so she went on through all these hours—strangely calm, speaking in that tone of dreamy sadness, touching in the extreme.

"My darling, my darling!" was often all she could say.

The dawn was breaking in a grey line in the far-away sky, when Donna rose at length, and, hoping to rouse Gaie and induce her to move to her bed, she threw back the thick French curtains that hung over the windows, and opened the shutters that shut out the gleams of day.

This window looked towards Versailles. The innumerable towers and chimneys of the town, the outline of the leafless trees in the gardens, appeared dim and dusky in the struggling light. The shadow of night seemed rolling back in heavy sombre clouds from the horizon. The morning was breaking, chill, wintry, and grey.

Gaie looked out as she sat up in her chair, her fair hair falling tangled over her shoulders, her blue eyes dull and strangely dilated, her cheek pale as her white dress.

Her mind was still full of Victor's words—full of the sense of his presence, strengthened with his courage, calm with the calmness he had assumed to inspire her. She looked a few minutes out into the morning light. It was cold, dreary, and chill.

Suddenly she called, "Donna!" uttering the name with a quick, gasping sob.

"Why am I so frightened, Donna? What is it? He said to have courage—he gave me courage when he spoke—but it is gone. Oh, Donna, Donna!"

"My Gaie, what can I do for you? Try to think again of all he said; try to have faith and hope, Gaie, we may still have hope."

"No, no, no hope; only fear. It is like thunder, Donna—what is it? Something dreadful, fearful, coming over me! What is it? Oh, I am so afraid!"

"Oh! why has it come?" she cried again. "Oh, why am I so afraid? Oh, Victor, Victor! what is it? Donna, hold me close! Donna, Donna, what is it?"

"My darling!"

"It is like thunder—terribly, terribly close—rolling near us. I am afraid!"

"Let me lay you down, darling—Gaie, my own sister, my love!"

"Yes, let me; I will lie down," she said; "but do not leave me, Donna—stay by me, let me feel you here. Oh, Victor! they cannot—they cannot! How weak I am, Donna; I thought I could be strong like him."

"Lie down, dearest," repeated Donna; and she drew her gently across the room, and laid her, like a weary, frightened child, in her bed.

"Try and keep quiet; I will close the curtain again," Donna said, when she had watched a moment and seen that the fit of hysterical terror was passing away.

"Do," Gaie murmured, "do, Donna, do. I am not so frightened now."

Donna walked to the window.

It was quite daylight—it was about seven o'clock ; and as she approached, and Gaie lay still and more composed, she could not help pausing to look out upon the grey winter morning, to strive to steady her own thoughts, and to gather herself together to realize that the chill of terror that had fallen over Gaie, as he day broke, could mean.

What could it mean? Donna trembled, too, as he looked out at the grey morning, and felt indeed that it *might* bring.

Gaie called her again presently, and she turned and approached.

Her sister lay quiet now. She lay—her eyes closed, the wet lashes lying upon her cheek, the deadly pallor had left her face, a faint flush of color tinged her cheek.

They were both silent for a moment, while Donna watched ; till suddenly, in the stillness of the dawn, a faint sound reached them—the soft twittering at their window of two wakening birds.

“Yes, that is it,” Gaie whispered, “that is it ; it *was* come. But I forgot them—Donna, tell me—the words, I mean. You remember the words, long ago—the thunder—the birds—and lying still, so still.”

The painful, terrified expression passed more and more completely away as she lay there, and a sweet, peaceful smile curled her quivering lip as Donna’s voice murmured in the quiet of the breaking day the old sweet words which Gaie had remembered in her agony, and called for—to soothe her fears :—

“ Under the shroud
Of His thunder-cloud,
Lie ye still, when His voice is loud,
And you *will* feel
His love-notes steal,
Like the bird’s song
After the thunder-peal.”

“For his banner over us is—Love.”

CHAPTER XLV.

GOLDEN LIGHT.

THE watch of that night was kept by yet another.

Piers had tossed sleeplessly from side to side through every one of these hours that intervened between the time when they returned from the prison after Gaie's parting with Victor, and the breaking of the morning light over the towers and chimneys of Paris—over Versailles and Satory, some miles away.

As the first streak of dawn flickered in the east, he rose from his bed, and dressed hurriedly. The passionate anxiety of his heart impelled him to hurry even thus early to the precincts of Satory.

He dressed, and hurried out.

It was still dark, and where his road lay, by the river, as he turned out of the Champs Elysées, the lamps glistened still amid the thick, leafless branches of the trees.

He hurried along, something impelling him, some fresh instinctive sense of terror and foreboding thrilling him this morning—a stronger anxiety than usual driving him to make that early inquiry, earlier than usual, at the prison gate.

As he passed by the Maison de Justice, he met a file of sergents-de-ville, and as he looked up suddenly—for he had been hurrying along with his eyes fixed moodily upon the ground—he looked and saw that all along the broad Avenue de Paris, and trooping up from the side streets, were soldiers already at this early hour—a battery of artillery, a company of chasseurs, some troops of carbineers and other cavalry.

He knew where they were going, and he watched them a moment with a throbbing heart; they would *ride on*, on till they had climbed the steep heights of

the hill-side, and till they stood in the grey dawn on the table land of Satory.

He had seen on many mornings these companies drooping silently along. He watched them now for a few moments, and just then he saw what he was seeking—an empty coupé. He sprang into it, and, at his hasty order, the man turned his horse's head and drove swiftly towards Versailles.

They reached the precincts of the Communists' prisons, and Piers sprang quickly to the ground.

The gate of the prison was surrounded by sergents-de-ville in the smart new uniform of the Republic, and soldiers with uniforms worn and tarnished, bearing signs of service in the months gone by.

Piers could not get near the prison door; he had to wait on the fringe of the square of soldiers; he had to wait with the crowd of people who gathered fast now, even at this early hour.

He waited—they all waited; the daylight grew, a chill wind swept round them, and the Frenchmen still stamped their feet and exclaimed with impatience at the delay.

"*Soyez tranquille*," some one said philosophically; "*soyez tranquille, mon cher, ça sera l'heure militaire*."

And so it was.

The tones of a distant clock were wafted suddenly to them, striking slowly, with stern solemnity, the morning hour. From the outskirts of the battalions of troops the roll of the drum resounded beating the signal "*aux champs*."

Far over the distance of the fatal Satory plains came the clang of the signal trumpet responding and announcing the hour, and instantly, simultaneously, the doors of the prison swung heavily open.

The troops dressed and closed in, a thrill shot through the crowd of spectators, a murmur of excitement and half horror burst from them, as, close surrounded by *gens-d'armes*, *sergents-de-ville* and soldiers

of the Garde and of the line, there emerged the three condemned of to-day.

One on one side Kerré, that grim cruel-visaged man, whose sanguinary deeds filled the world with horror, whose order, "*Faites flamber Finance*," consigned Paris to the flames. On the other side Luller, once colonel in the Communist army, a man whose short-lived authority had been applied to the murder of those very priests who had tended the wounded,—French, Prussians, Republicans, and Communists alike. The man whose hand had shot down fathers and sons, women and children, in the horrid tyranny of the *travaux forcés* on the Communist barricades.

For such men there lives no pity—there rises no protest from the most sensitive heart.

But for him who walked between them? Erect, undaunted, his eyes grave but full of courage, his uncovered head held up firmly, walked Victor Lescar.

His hour had come. This morning was the morning of his doom; this daybreak was to be his last. Walking between a murderer and an infamous incendiary—strange contrast in mien and in expression as he was in character and heart.

He walked firmly, his head erect, his eyes calm and clear.

He looked round on the mass of soldiers, and past them to the gathering crowd, and then—not till then—his step faltered for an instant, his cheek grew a shade more pale, his eyes glistened with a new light, a gleam shot from them of regret and pain. They had lit among that surging crowd upon the dark countenance of his friend.

"Victor, my friend! my brother!" he cried, in loud tones of agony and despair. "Victor!"

Quite in vain. A dozen hands were laid on him; the muzzles of a dozen rifles were held close to his ear. In vain he struggled. He called again, "Victor, Victor!" maddened with the agony of despair.

But he could not reach him—he could not touch

him ; only the pitying sympathetic glance of the eager eyes met his, as Victor turned sadly to see him struggling with that hopeless force. He put up his hand, deprecating Piers's efforts ; his lips moved, but the words could not reach his friend.

"Do not !" he seemed trying to urge by sign and speech—"do not ! Go, my friend ; it is hopeless—useless. I am resigned ; be you also submissive. It is in vain."

He was seized by a force strong and irresistible ; he was dragged back, and held forcibly, while the ranks closed in and the order was given to move.

They surrounded the prisoners, and pressed near them, as the mob became excited ; they moved on slowly in a dense massive block of men.

They passed him slowly ; they filed out of the prison-yard ; they turned towards Satory, and they were gone.

The crowd followed eagerly close upon their heels, and the men who held Piers in their grasp flung him roughly from them to the ground, shouldered their muskets, and ran onwards to their post ; soldiers and people in a dense mass, they moved on.

Piers fell upon a heap of stones—the *débris* of the ruin of a fallen house, and in the agony of his despair and sorrow he lay there, his face covered with his hands, all the grief and bitterness of their parting flooding over his spirit in one moment like the rushing of a mighty wave.

He had lain, how long he knew not—an hour it *might* have been, a few minutes it really *was* (while the sound of the tramp of that retreating squadron sank slowly into the distance),—when—suddenly—there came along the road another sound—a loud clatter of a horse's hoof.

A mounted cuirassier dashed along at furious speed ; his horse, *ventre à terre*, came clattering over the hard causeway : he galloped up the avenue ; he swung round the corner, he reached the gateway of

the prison ; and then only Piers became conscious of his approach.

The trooper was swearing loud and angrily : the horse had shied at Piers's prostrate figure, had stopped suddenly in his rapid stride, and was plunging violently on the road beside him.

Piers sat up ; he looked confusedly round.

How long had he lain there ? Only a few minutes—yes, that was all ; for,—far down the route towards Satory plain, where the ambulance stood,—there still filed that sombre mass of soldiers,—tramping through the misty light under the low-hanging sky.

The trooper plunged his spurs into his horse's side ; he swore again at Piers, as he struggled with his rattling bridle ; and then he conquered, and again he dashed furiously on.

Down the route towards Satory he went, close on the track of that retreating mass, galloping rapidly over the ground ; and Piers, with a strange fascination, watched him.

Dark against the heavy mists of the morning sky the mass of soldiers moved on ; swift towards them sped the mounted cuirassier, the clash of his arms and the sharp ring of his horse's hoofs echoing loud and clear in the morning air.

And Piers watched the moving crowd, the dark lowering sky, the horse and man dashing over the long straight road.

A moment—he has caught them ; and he halts ; a moment more, and the dark massive squadron, moving so steadily, suddenly halts as well.

What is this ?

Far away, beyond the towers of Versailles and the brown wintry trees of the gardens, the sun is rising and struggling to burst through the gloomy mist of the wintry dawn.

It breaks over the black cloud that has hung all *this* time low in the horizon ; it sheds a ray of golden *radiance* down the long dreary road ; it lights on that

mass of halting soldiers ; it tips their shakos and the trappings of their uniform, till they glisten in the sudden lustre of the morning ray.

There is a curious movement among them ; the dense human wall seems to break for one moment—they separate ; and Piers can distinguish a large division and a small.

On moved again the large mass, away beyond that sun-ray, into the distant and misty gloom ; and the little company that is left behind them stands immovable, the golden light still tipping the soldiers' heads.

Piers gazed and gazed still, shading his eyes from the sudden burst of light ; he gazed along the straight road, watching the dark mass that is again retreating, scanning the little company that stand in the hope and glory of the day.

Clatter now come the horse's hoofs again. The trooper is returning, but slowly, trotting leisurely and carelessly along, his rein loosed, his whole attitude relaxed : his duty was done.

A strange excitement, as the soldier drew near to him, seized upon Piers.

He sprang up ; he stood straight in the horseman's way ; he laid a firm hand upon the hanging rein.

"Well?" growled the cuirassier angrily ; but instantly, with characteristic bonhomie, he altered his mien. He stopped his horse, glad to light his pipe in this chilly morning, glad to let his steed cool his hot sides while he exchanged a moment's gossip with this unknown friend.

"Grand Dieu !" exclaimed Piers, breathless with agitation. "What took you there—there?" he cried, pointing down the road towards the soldiers.

"Hah ! well, and what is that to you?" growled the horseman with a sardonic grin. "*Que fais-je, moi, dans cette galère—eh ?* I went with an errand, *mon bon* ; and an errand that did not brook delay. Three were condemned to die this morning ; but ma

foi que voulez-vous? Monsieur le Président has changed his mind."

"Who?—which? Tell me; good God, speak!" Piers cried.

"*Ma foi!* I do not know; I forget. Let me see. There are so many of them. But, if you will, this is the order: read it for yourself. It is no great thing," he went on: "they spare the life of one man; and *Ciel!* there are so many. But this time it pleases me. It is well! *Communiste, si vous voulez, oui; mais c'est égal, il est un brave. Monsieur, adieu.*"

Piers moved from him: his hand dropped from the rein; the soldier passed slowly on.

It was a short list—three names, the *condamnés* of this morning.

Across one name a line was drawn—opposite one name, on the margin, some words were written.

His head swam; he could not read for the hot tears that rushed to his eyes. What was this?

Had some mysterious messenger visited the members of the Council of Pardons in the dark watches of the bygone night, warning them against the dark deed they intended—bidding them to stain not their hands, nor the pages of French history, with this innocent blood?

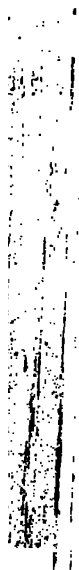
It is impossible to tell: why it was, how it came to pass, was revealed to no one.

But—on that piece of paper, carrying its messages of human life and death,—the line was drawn across, the words were written opposite, the name of—

VICTOR LESCAR.

THE END.







**a book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

[illegible]

